TOWARD A LITURGICAL AESTHETIC:

An Interdisciplinary Review of Aesthetic Theory

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In any discussion of Christian liturgy—whether theological, historical, or devotional—aesthetic language is never very far under the surface. Worshipers compliment presiders by thanking them for a "beautiful service." The theological content of Christian rites is assessed by establishing the relationship of their content and form. Historical studies rarely fail to discuss (if in other terms) what might be called the poetics of liturgical texts. This use of aesthetic language is inevitable, of course—as inevitable as is the manipulation of sound and silence, space and gesture in the enactment of Christian worship. Yet for all its inevitability, it is rarely the object of critical reflection—except, of course, when some undefined boundary is crossed, as when Beauty becomes the object and not just the means of worship, or when the aesthetic dimensions of liturgy are ignored and liturgical celebrations slip into the vagaries of shallow sentimentality. Nevertheless, in recent years, a few voices have begun to call for a more sustained and rigorous study of the proper aesthetic dimensions of liturgy and liturgical experience.[1]

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[1] See, for example, Kevin Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), 250.

This review essay—indeed this entire issue of *Liturgy Digest*—attempts to jump-start further critical thinking on the relationship between liturgy and aesthetics. This is not an attempt to aestheticize liturgy, but rather to reflect critically on the inevitable aesthetic dimension of public worship. Importantly, the strategy for this essay is not simply to review artistic components in common liturgical celebration, but rather to attempt (somewhat brashly) to propose lines for integrating insights from both philosophical and theological aesthetics into an emerging theory of liturgical aesthetics. This essay briefly surveys several broad lines of theoretical discussion in search of potential conversation partners for liturgists who wish to reflect on the aesthetic aspects of both religious experience and communal liturgy. *The contribution of this essay lies foremost it its proposed organization of this interdisciplinary exchange.* No one theory is presented here in detail. Rather, this essay outlines several often divergent approaches to aesthetic theory. The three large sections of this analysis correspond to three different scholarly communities and three different methodologies:

I *Section one* explores ***philosophical aesthetics***, a discipline which both proposes comprehensive explanatory theories of aesthetics and refines our understanding of particular aspects of aesthetic or artistic experience. In this section, representative theories are explored, with an eye for those which hold promise for particular issues in liturgical aesthetics.

II *Section two* probes ***theological aesthetics***. This field includes reflection on the aesthetic dimensions of theology itself and theological theses relevant to the arts or the concept of beauty. Again, the implications of theological aesthetics for liturgical aesthetics will be noted.

III *Section three* focuses on what might be called ***liturgical aesthetics***. This is understood to include reflections on both beauty and art that arise from reflection on the liturgy itself (liturgical theology) and pertain directly to the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of the liturgy.

This outline assumes that liturgists can profit from wide reading in philosophical and theological aesthetics. As a pioneering effort in such interdisciplinary reading, this essay seeks only to *begin* a conversation, in the hope that future work will refine, challenge, and correct the lines of thought proposed here.

Throughout the first two sections of this review essay, brief paragraphs suggesting the liturgical implications of various topics are inserted into the text. These are clearly marked by a change in typography. Readers will also notice a shift in voice, from more descriptive to more assertive discourse. Thus, readers will find in this report three lines of analysis moving simultaneously together. The first, in regular type, provides the main text, describing a wide range of aesthetic theories. The second, in **small bold-faced type**, provides a commentary from the point of view of liturgical studies. The third, in the footnotes, provides an annotated bibliography and additional commentary.

Perhaps the most daunting challenge in undertaking such an essay is to find a starting point, an orientation to the complexities of aesthetic theory. Otherwise, the sheer vastness and complexity of philosophical and theological aesthetics are likely to overwhelm the project. For such a point of orientation, this essay looks to the recent work of two important and prominent theorists, Frank Burch Brown and Nicholas Wolterstorff.[2] Their work is particularly promising for liturgical aesthetics for several reasons. First, both writers are acutely aware of the philosophical and theological dimensions of aesthetics. Second, their works are readable even by philosophical novices. Third, they are both very interested in liturgy; their writing includes numerous examples drawn from liturgical experience. Fourth—and most importantly—their theoretical orientation points away from what might be called "purist aesthetics" and is thus far kinder to an emerging liturgical aesthetic than many other recent contributions to aesthetic theory. Although this essay attempts more than a mere summary of their work (and may in fact propose lines of inquiry they would reject), their influence will be evident throughout.

I. PHILOSOPHICAL AESTHETICS

Though it was not considered a distinct discipline for inquiry among philosophers until roughly the seventeenth century, the history of aesthetic theory in philosophy dates back at least as far as Plato's famous dialogues on the subject of Beauty, including *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. But it was Immanuel Kant's third critique, *The Critique of Judgement*, that assured the permanent (if not the premier) place of philosophical aesthetics as a distinct field of inquiry. Since Kant, aesthetic topics have been the central concern of a small cadre of thinkers, a surprising number of whom work in relative isolation from each other. This has led to some fragmentation in the discipline, as is signaled by the lack of consensus regarding the subject, methods, and criteria of aesthetic theory. As mentioned above, perhaps the most this report can achieve is to propose an adequate outline for assessing the contribution of philosophical aesthetics. The following outline will guide us through the complexities of philosophical aesthetics:

A. *Basic Definitions and Distinctions*
   1. Art vs. Aesthetics
   2. The Components of Aesthetics
   3. Fine Arts and the Individual Arts

B. *Prominent Theories of Aesthetics and Art*
   1. Art as *Mimesis*
   2. Art as Expression of Emotion
   3. Art in Itself
   4. Art in Action

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[2] Burch Brown's work is presented most fully in *Transfiguration: Poetic Metaphor and the Languages of Religious Belief* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), and *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989). Wolterstorff's thought is presented in *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), and *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980). Of these, *Works and Worlds of Art* is a more technical philosophical argument, whereas *Art in Action* provides both a more popular analysis as well as the religious context and background of his philosophical argument.

C. *The Components of Aesthetics*
  1. Aesthetic and Artistic Making
    - The Artist as Creator
    - The Artist in an Environment
    - Art and World-Projection

  2. Aesthetics and Artistic Objects
    - Materiality and Contemporaneity
    - Distinguishable Aspects of Art
    - Form—Significant and Symbolic

  3. Appropriating Aesthetic and Artistic Works
    - Components of Aesthetic Experience
      Perception
      Response
      Interpretation
      Evaluation, Critique
    - Particular Theories of Aesthetic Experience
      "Aesthetic Attitude"
      Playfulness of Aesthetic Experience (Gadamer)
      A Critique of Contemplation (Wolterstorff)
      The Aesthetic Milieu (Burch Brown)
      Debated Territory: Aesthetic Taste

A. *Basic Definitions and Distinctions*

A first major contribution from philosophical aesthetics is its careful charting of the primary topics to be covered. In particular, analytic philosophy—through its careful use of example and counterexample, categories and distinctions—points the careful student to the primary topics and issues. At least the following distinctions are important in the development of aesthetic theory.

1) A first key distinction is that between *aesthetics* and *art*, between a *theory of aesthetics* and a *theory of the arts*.

The term "aesthetics" is derived from the Greek *aisthetikos*, a word most commonly used to refer to human perception. At root, something aesthetic is something perceptible. In a vague sense, "aesthetics" is often used to speak about the artistic or perhaps simply the nuanced qualities of some artifact or experience. So everything from an ancient totem to the choice of exterior paint on one's home is taken to be a matter of aesthetics. More narrowly, "aesthetics" refers to the scholarly (usually philosophical) discussion of either the arts or the nature of beauty. Still more narrowly, at times, "aesthetics" as a field is contrasted with theories of art, such that a "theory of art" refers to a particular art or the arts-in-general, whereas aesthetics is more properly concerned with only certain features of artworks, namely the aesthetic features, or those that have to do with Beauty, Taste, or something like "aesthetic attitude." Such aesthetic features may also characterize things other than artworks, such as natural phenomena (sunsets, trees, tropical fish) or even ideas.

Thus, a central debate emerges over whether "the arts" and "Beauty" ought be considered coterminous.[3] Frank Burch Brown, for one, points out that "it is far from evident that art and beauty go together." He goes on to argue that aesthetic theory must not be limited to a philosophy of (fine) art, in part because it might "make aesthetics seem pertinent only to a rather restricted and often elite sector of human making and meaning," yet he also acknowledges that works of art "are among the few things that human beings ever make solely with the intention of providing aesthetic delight."[4] This explains the virtual equation of philosophy of art and aesthetics in much of the scholarly literature. Because a good deal of the scholarly literature blurs the distinction between aesthetics and art, this essay will proceed by analyzing aesthetic and artistic theories side by side. Important distinctions between the two will be observed when necessary.

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[3] Several anthologies in philosophical aesthetics maintain a strict division between articles on art *per se* and those on aesthetics. See, for example, George Dickie and R. J. Sclafani, *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977).

[4] *Religious Aesthetics*, 21, 5, 77, respectively.

LITURGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This distinction between art and aesthetics is important and necessary for both liturgists and theologians. For certainly in theological aesthetics, not all references to beauty intend to include references to art as such, nor to particular artworks. Jonathan Edwards, for one, frequently spoke of the beauty of God and of creation, but did not always link this language with art. Likewise, in liturgical aesthetics, liturgical artworks can be described in terms of many dimensions, of which an aesthetic dimension is only one. As we shall see, in the liturgical arts, aesthetic considerations interact with religious, social, political and other elements to produce multivalent meanings.

As in philosophy, art and aesthetics represent two distinct, though interrelated, topics for liturgical studies. Liturgical celebration involves a number of particular art-forms: architecture, music, poetry, etc. Liturgical experience is also often described in aesthetic terms, as when "beauty," "luminosity," "creativity," or "representation" are used either as technical terms or in popular discourse. Supposing that all aesthetic terms refer to liturgical arts or that liturgical arts exhaust the aesthetic dimension of liturgical experience are errors that can be avoided by attending to this distinction.

2) A second distinction is that made among theories of the arts or aesthetic theories, with regard to their proper object of study.

At first glance, aesthetic theory appears to be a daunting and impossibly confused area of inquiry. One can read five books of recent aesthetic theory and find no points of correspondence among them. With the probable exception of Plato and Kant, recent works may not even refer to any of the same historical figures or key works. Although this may point to the fragmentation of the discipline of philosophical aesthetics, more fundamentally it may simply reflect the various possible objects of study for the discipline, of which three broad topics can be discerned.

a) *A first topic of inquiry is the act of aesthetic making or, more narrowly, creating or generating art.* The focus here is squarely on the artist, the maker. Favorite topics of study include the nature of intuition, imagination, and expression. Emphasis often falls on the nature of the experience out of which art arises.

b) *A second topic is that of the artwork itself.* Theorists discuss, for example, what the ontological status of an artwork is and what elements of the artwork's context are significant for its bearing of meaning. In the case of music, theorists discuss what the "real" piece of music is—the musical score or the performance—and why.

c) *A third—and perhaps the largest—topic is that of the reception or experience of an aesthetic object or artwork.* This line of inquiry is concerned with the aesthetic experience of the beholder. Sub-topics include the *contemplation* or *appropriation* or *appreciation* of works of art, the *description* of works of art and which categories are used for that purpose, and the *criticism* of works of art and which criteria are fitting for that purpose. Theorizing in this vein has produced a set of terms ranging from "taste" to "aesthetic attitude" to "aesthetic emotion," all of which attempt to describe the process of receiving or appropriating or appreciating works of art and aesthetic merit.

Now the choice of a particular object of study is often determined by which component a theorist considers to be fundamental ("quintessential") for either aesthetics or art. Often one aspect is believed to be constitutive of art or *aesthetica.* Some believe that *creativity* determines what is art or what has aesthetic merit. Others believe it lies in the *form* of the artwork itself. Still others believe the *process of receiving an artwork* as such determines its status as aesthetic. Aware of these theoretical implications, the discussion of the components of aesthetic theories (section C of this section) follows this tripartite form.[5]

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[5] Frank Burch Brown defines these various objects according to the following terminology: "aesthetic objects (*aesthetica*), aesthetic experience (*aesthesis*), and aesthetic making (*poiesis*)." *Religious Aesthetics*, 6.

Liturgical Implications

Liturgical experience can also be analyzed according to a similar three-part heuristic: there is the study of the act of creating or generating liturgies and the arts which complement them [this dimension may be problematic, as we shall see], there is the study of liturgy itself, and there is the study of how liturgy is experienced. Perhaps this final topic has received the least amount of attention in liturgical studies to date. We know a great deal about how liturgical texts, spaces, and gestures came about, a fair amount about their structure and essential components, but generally far less about how they are experienced—about the particular faculties, tastes, and sensitivities that either inhibit or foster "full, conscious, and active participation." Importantly, it is this third topic that has received the most attention in philosophical aesthetics, suggesting that liturgists may profit from interdisciplinary collaboration.

3) What are the arts?

A final question of definition and clarification concerns which activities and artifacts are properly considered art. What are the arts? Or, what are *fine* arts? Music? Dance? Drama? Sculpture? Painting? Poetry? Architecture? Probably there are few who would doubt that these are among the arts. But what about film and story-telling? Or jewelry-making, sewing, home-decorating, cooking, flower arranging, gardening, and speech-making [that includes sermons and homilies]? Is there such a thing as the arts-in-general, something that is common to all of these? And then, for our purposes, is liturgy an art?

Questions like these point out important uses of English terms relevant to our study. Notice first of all how we tend to use the term "art" to describe anything that is done with great skill, nuance, or creativity. Notice how often we say "well this is really an art" or "she makes this task [e.g. conversation, hospitality, writing liturgical history] into an art-form." Second, what philosophical aesthetics attends to most typically is limited to the fine arts. Distinctions are made between fine art and popular art or, in the case of Nicholas Wolterstorff, between fine art, popular art, and tribal art. Yet serious theoretical discussions of popular art remain few and far between. Third, the naming of certain arts as fine arts is remarkably culture- and time-bound. Not until the eighteenth century in the West were painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry all considered to be among the fine arts.[6] Awareness of equivocation on such classifications helps clarify the relative status of several of the following theories.

B. *Prominent Theories of Aesthetics and Art*

A second (and impossibly large) contribution from philosophical aesthetics consists of the large, explanatory aesthetic theories that have influenced Western culture for more than three millennia. Most of these comprehensive theories attempt to describe what is fundamental or at the very essence of aesthetic experience. While the essence of art or aesthetic experience may not be of primary concern to liturgists, the implications of these theories have far-reaching consequences for the use of aesthetic language in discussions about liturgy and for the role assigned to individual arts in Christian worship. They also have had incalculable influence on the development of the arts that accompany liturgy. Further, these theories illuminate particular aspects of experience, including liturgical experience, in ways that refine our understanding of how meaning—whether symbolic or non-symbolic, whether discursive or non-discursive—is communicated and experienced. Although only the broadest outlines of these theories can be sketched here, even brief summaries are sufficient to suggest their implications for liturgical studies.

1) Art as *Mimesis*

Nearly every anthology of philosophical aesthetics begins with Plato's theory of art as *mimesis*. Art, according to mimetic theories, imitates a physical object, an experience, a situation—that is, some aspect of the material world. Art is an imitation. But there is more. For Plato, at least, the very things art imitates are themselves imitations. That is, the subject of most art is merely the material instantiation of a primary Form. For Plato, this meant that artworks were ontologically inferior, less real, than either the subjects they depicted or the forms those subjects instantiated. Aristotle accepted, but refined, the language of art as mimesis. He contended that mimesis did not necessarily have to portray particular occurrences; it might also portray nature as it *could be* in an ideal form. Art thus could depict the generalized or the ideal.

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[6] See Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 465-527.

Especially significant in these early theories of mimesis is the notion that there are certain properties inherent in nature/creation itself to which art must conform. The Platonic conception of a "Form" is but one way, a metaphysical way, of describing these. The language of conforming to nature is also used when mathematical proportions are identified as natural rules of grammar for the production of art. This is clearly the case in music in the West, where the consonances of the fourth, fifth, and octave are defended in terms of their physical properties, their manifestation of certain precise relationships between overtones. Of interest here is the notion that art points to or manifests something more fundamental, real, and ultimate than itself, that it conforms to some other more objective reality—whether this is described as a cosmic force or principle, a mathematical rule or a spiritual reality.

As the Platonic worldview faded, the mimetic theory of art certainly lost influence, particularly the notion that an artwork portrays something more objective than itself. But even if this metaphysical assumption has been challenged, it simply is the case that a good deal of even modern and post-modern art is mimetic or representational. It depicts something else, attempts to describe something else, or is presented in reference to something else. The fact that many paintings clearly refer to a particular, actual object—or that music may still be written with programmatic intent—reveals that

both artists and their audiences continue to posit a relationship between artworks and other entities. This fact warrants continued attention to precisely how art imitates, represents, or portrays something else.

One recent and rather sophisticated analysis of representational art is Kendall L. Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. Walton argues that "what all representations have in common is a role in *make-believe*."[7] He is particularly insightful in describing the powerful and pervasive nature of experiencing art through make-believe, through "being caught up in a story." He compares appreciating art to playing children's games, where one participates for a time in a fictional world. Thus even art that is purposefully representational, that intends to portray "reality," is approached, in part, in terms of its distance from reality, its way of picturing a make-believe world. Walton's work is sufficient to point out that the representational, mimetic quality of art is an important, if not *the essential* feature of artworks, and is the object of study down to the present day.

LITURGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The language of *mimesis* pervades traditional theologizing about liturgy. Liturgical celebration, it is said, represents or re-presents the work of Christ in the worshiping community. Liturgy rehearses memories, it recounts narratives, it depicts relationships. This same language has been used extensively in recent years regarding Scripture itself.[8] In fact, all talk of liturgy as *anamnesis* and all talk of liturgy as *iconic* point to the *mimetic* dimension of liturgy. All of these terms operate in the same metaphorical world. They are metaphors of representation. And to the extent that liturgy is mimetic, these mimetic aesthetic theories are illuminating for liturgists. This does not imply that liturgists need to adopt a Platonic worldview to benefit

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[7] Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representative Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 7.

[8] See Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953); and Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

from these theories. Nor does it suggest that mimesis exhausts the meaning of common worship. Rather it assumes that reflecting on one dimension of liturgy, its mimetic dimension, by means of philosophical analysis of mimesis will aid liturgists in both understanding and catechizing about this important quality.

2) Expression of Emotion

At the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that for the millennia following Plato and Aristotle, the Western mind thought of art primarily as *mimesis*, representation. In the last two centuries, the Western mind has tended to see art as *expression*. In the memorable images of M. H. Abrams, the Western mind that once thought of art as a *mirror*, reflecting the nature of the cosmos, now considers art to be a *lamp*, generating its own light by which to give form, nuance, and understanding to the cosmos.[9]

Expressivist theories focus squarely on the artist and act of creating. Their fundamental thesis, despite endless variety in the nuances introduced by various theorists, is simple: art is the expression of emotion. Art arises out of intense emotional experience. Artistic making is the attempt of the artist to come to terms with or to portray unique experience. Artworks are valued for their unique and idiosyncratic characteristics, which are taken to be indicative of the idiosyncrasies of the artist. Prominent theorists in this vein include Leo Tolstoy, R. G. Collingwood, Benedetto Croce, and possibly Suzanne Langer. Collingwood simply asserts: "What the artist is trying to do is to express a given emotion."[10] Notice how this statement is concerned not about the audience of the given work but rather the act of creating itself. Again in Collingwood's words, "the expression of emotion, simply as expression, is not addressed to any particular audience. It is addressed primarily to the speaker himself, and secondarily to anyone who can

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[9] M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).

[10] R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 282.

understand."[11] This theory resulted in the Romantic notion of the artist as genius, as one who creates with imagination out of some poignant preconceptual emotional experience. It has also emphasized the individuality of the artist. Art is not understood as primarily something that mobilizes community or reflects a community's worldview as much as it is valued for portraying the individual expression of the artist.

Suzanne Langer's theory of art, itself influential among liturgists, also fits more or less in this rubric. She defines art as the following: "art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling."[12] The direct link between the feeling and the symbolic form of the artwork shows her expressivist orientation. In her words, "A work of art presents a feeling for our contemplation . . . artistic form is congruent with the dynamic forms of our direct sensuous, mental, and emotional life; works of art are projections of 'felt life'."[13] For Langer, then, artworks reveal something about human subjectivity to the viewer or listener because of their expressive quality.

At times expressive theories have been subsumed in larger schemes that rely on communication theory.[14] Here art is taken to be a communication event between persons, where the art work is the *medium* that expresses the inner feelings or thoughts of the *sender*. Tolstoy, for one, believed that the expressive qualities of art allowed it to be a primary form for communicating emotion:

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[11] *The Principles of Art*, anthologized in Patricia Werhane, *Philosophical Issues in Art* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1984), 221. This conception is sturdily critiqued by Wolterstorff: "The artist intends a public use. The Romantic notion that the artist simply pours his soul into his work with no thought of any public use for that work is wildly false to the realities of art." *Art in Action*, 16.

[12] For Langer's theory, see *Feeling and Form* (New York: Scribner's, 1953); *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942); and *Problems of Art* (New York: Scribner's, 1957). Her influence among liturgists is evidenced in the frequent use of the term "significant form" in recent writings by liturgists.

[13] *Problems of Art*, 25. The reason Langer's theory rests uneasily in this expressivist type is that she does admit that the arts do not always express the feelings of the given artist, but rather what the artist knows or senses about human subjectivity in general (*Problems of Art*, 26).

[14] See, for example, Asghar Talaye Minai, *Aesthetics, Mind, and Nature: A Communication Approach to the Unity of Matter and Consciousness* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1993). This book is about much more than communication theory, but it relies on a communication metaphor to unpack aesthetic experience. See also Edward Fischer, *Everybody Steals from God: Communication as Worship* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977).

> "To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked it in oneself then by means of movement, lines, colours, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling—that is the activity of art.
>
> Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one . . . consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them."[15]

Passages like this have encouraged the use of communication metaphors for understanding how art works. Thus terms like "sender" are "receiver" applied to particular dimensions of aesthetic experience.

As with mimetic theories, critiques of expressivistic theories often admit that expression is an important aspect of art, but argue that it is not the only or most important aspect.[16] Even if it is granted that every work of art reveals something of the artist, and is therefore expressive, it need not be argued that the primary feature of a given work is its expressive quality, nor that every work is primarily experienced as the conveyor of emotion. This is particularly pertinent for artistic traditions that call for the artist to suppress her or his own feelings or attitudes so as to portray something more "objective," as in some Eastern traditions of iconographic art.

Liturgical Implications

Expressivist theories of art may pose the greatest problems for a possible liturgical analogue. For one, expressive theories are almost always described in individual, not communal terms. The solitary artist expresses emotion. Yet liturgy at its best is the function of a community, not of a given person.

For another, the claim that liturgy is only an expression of emotional or religious experience is highly debatable. Although nineteenth and twentieth century (Protestant) liberal thought would argue that all religious forms, including ritual forms, are ultimately nothing more than expressions of prior religious experience, both traditional and recent liturgical theology assume that liturgy, in addition to expressing faith, is also *opus dei*—an arena for God's activity, as well as the place where Christians are confronted with something far larger, even more objective, than themselves—the Word of God and the presence of Christ.

Perhaps most often, however, expressivist theories influence not the understanding of worship as a whole, but rather the liturgical arts in particular. Sculptors and musicians, who typically assume that their art expresses their emotion or experience, may experience tension when asked to be the servant of the community. The reason why much popular Christian music, for example, is ill suited to liturgy is that it attempts to express the particular experience or journey of an individual artist, not the community. The expressive qualities of the arts are significant, to be sure, but hardly exhaust the criteria for the artforms employed in Christian worship.

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[15] Leo Tolstoy, "What Is Art," in W. E. Kennick, *Art and Philosophy: Readings in Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2nd ed., 1979), 37. Tolstoy sets his theory off from others described here as he continues: "Art is not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestation of some mysterious Idea of beauty or God; it is not, as the aesthetic physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored-up energy; it is not the expression of man's emotions by external signs; it is not the production of pleasing objects; and, above all, it is not pleasure; but it is a means of union among men joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards well-being of individuals and of humanity."

[16] For example, Nicholas Wolterstorff refines the concept of expression in arguing that "there is always a world behind the work, of which the work is an expression," where the world behind the work of art refers to "that complex of the artist's beliefs and goals, convictions and concerns" so that "works of art are not simply the oozings of subconscious impulses; they are the result of beliefs and goals on the part of the artist" (*Art in Action*, 88-89).

3) Art in Itself; Art for Art's Sake

In mimetic theories what is important is the relationship between the artwork and some external entity. In expressive theories what is important is the relationship between the artwork and the emotion of the artist. But in purist, formalist theories such a relationship is not important. Rather, art is understood to exist for its own sake, not for some other function. It is self-contained, autonomous. Art simply *is*. As Frank Burch Brown defines it, purist theories are those that "see anything that can be considered aesthetic as something essentially self-contained rather than as interactive" or "the tendency to equate the artistic with the aesthetic and then to treat the aesthetic as inherently isolated form everything else." Such purist, formalist theories have been offered by Clive Bell and Monroe Beardsley among others. For one example, Bell's extended discussion of a unique "aesthetic" emotion betrays his purist orientation. Burch Brown identifies three common assumptions that attend purist aesthetics: 1) "the value of art *qua* art derives from nothing other than its capacity to maximize purely aesthetic qualities and pleasures;" 2) "all aesthetic qualities are ones apprehended in the act of 'free' contemplation;" and 3) "the exercise of taste is unalloyed and exclusive, entirely concerned with form or with a unique sort of feeling expressed by the 'object itself,' which one values for 'its own sake'."[17] Purist aesthetic theories have particularly influenced the institution of fine art in Western culture. The museum as an institution of preserving art reflects a purist understanding of art, preserving artworks in their own distinct environment, isolated from other dimensions of public and private life, for the purpose of aesthetic contemplation.

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[17] *Religious Aesthetics*, 6, 28-29.

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Just as the world of arts has its aesthetes, so too world of liturgists has its effete connoisseurs. Just as some theorists have argued that art is an end in itself, so too have some said that about liturgy. The language of art-for-art's-sake is taken over as liturgy-for-liturgy's-sake. Yet, we don't worship *worship*, we worship God.

Purist theories are also applied to the liturgical arts. Here they may be particularly problematic. Bernini's sculptures may be objects of contemplation as art-in-itself in a museum, but is this how they function in a liturgical space? Bach's chorale preludes may be analyzed in a music theory classroom or played in an organ recital, but do they carry more meaning when they are played as a prophetic word in the context of public worship? The liturgical arts, it would seem, do not have their primary meaning in and of themselves. Rather, they gain meaning in relationship to their particular liturgical function.

4) Art and Human Action

In contrast to each of these three broad alternatives, Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that the essential quality of art is its relationship with human action. In his words,

> "I want to argue . . . that works of art are objects and instruments of action. They are all inextricably embedded in the fabric of human intention. They are objects and instruments of action whereby we carry out our intentions with respect to the world, our fellows, ourselves, and our gods. Understanding art requires understanding art in [hu]man life."[18]

Wolterstorff sees this understanding of art as broader and more inclusive than other explanatory theories:

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[18] *Art in Action*, 3.

> "Over and over one comes across the claims to the effect that such-and-such is 'the essential function of art.' 'Art is mimesis.' 'Art is self-expression.' 'Art is significant form.' All such formulae fall prey to the same dilemma. Either what is said to be characteristic of art is true of more than art. Or, if true only of art, it is not true of all art. The universality of art corresponds only to a diversity and flux of purposes, not to some pervasive and unique purpose. . . Seldom do we have before our mind's eye the whole broad sweep of the purposes of art."[19]

This is not to say that art may not be representative, or that it might not express the emotions of the artist, or that its form is not significant, but rather that these do not provide a satisfactory definition of art. They are not broad enough to account for the wealth and diversity of art. Thus, this definition, as Wolterstorff intends it, is broader and more inclusive than theories of mimesis or expression. But it is also exclusive, particularly of purist theories of art for art's sake. Art in this way of thinking must be understood in light of human activity, of human intention. Both the artist in making and the critic in appreciating are engaging in particular actions in, through, with, and for artworks.

LITURGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Art in action. **Perhaps no phrase better describes how the arts function within liturgy. Just as liturgists have frequently spoken of the "performative" quality of liturgical language, so too liturgical art has a performative quality.[20] It accomplishes the very acts of the liturgy: it proclaims; it prays; it remembers. The full implications of this line of reasoning will be explored in section three of this report.**

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[19] *Art in Action*, 18, 20.

[20] Liturgists have typically relied on the speech-action theory of J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). See also John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

These four theories briefly described here are representative of the many comprehensive aesthetic theories developed over the centuries. Notice how each focuses on very different entities and relationships. Mimetic theories tend to focus on the relationship between artworks and that which they portray or imitate. Expressive theories focus on the relationship between artworks and the artist. Art-for-art's-sake approaches focus only on the work itself. Action theories focus on the verbs, the actions, that are attached to the artist and the artwork. More elements of these theories will be explored in what follows.

C. *The Components of Aesthetic and Artistic Entities*

In addition to proposing comprehensive explanatory theories, philosophical aesthetics examines particular aspects of aesthetic making and meaning, such as the nature of artworks, the process of artistic creating, and the like. These discussions—which will be discussed here according to the threefold division described above—are not independent. Rather they often depend upon a particular orientation or operative explanatory theory. Also, they are not isolated from each other, but rather are necessarily interwoven. As Arnold Berleant argued in defending his division of conceptual territory in aesthetic theory: "these [component parts] stand, not as separate elements or constituents that combine with others in aesthetic experience, but as distinguishable dimensions or perspectives of what functions as a homogenous field of experiential forces."[21] The following paragraphs examine in turn particular component aspects of the whole of aesthetic experience.

1) Aesthetic Making; Generating Art

- Artist as Creator

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[21] Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), xii.

Our first study concerns the act of making or generating art and the person who carries out these tasks. Perhaps the most common term for generating art or aesthetic making is that of "creating." Nicholas Wolterstorff contends "our most pervasive image of the artist" is that of artist as creator "like unto God," where the "artist is a center of consciousness" who must "bring forth an expression of himself in the form of a new creation," who must "struggle to create in freedom," and who must "free [her/]himself from the residue of [her/]his predecessor's efforts" to "pursue novelty, originality, innovation."[22]" This concept of artist as creator is frequently Christianized such that it is seen as analogous to God's act of creating the world.[23]

Two aspects of this image are important. The first is its persistent call for innovation. For at least the past few centuries in the West, the measure of good artists has been their ability to generate something new, something never before imagined. A second feature of this image is the pride-of-place given to the elusive, even spiritual quality of artistic making. There is an element in artistic and aesthetic making that cannot be explained by appeals to human cognition or other mental faculties. "The Muse inspired me," it is said. Kant simply called it "genius." Other theories have linked it to the human faculty of imagination.[24]

However it might be described in popular and scholarly sources, the image of artist as creator is certainly not universally accepted—think only of the tribal seamstress or the baroque musician, each of whom is considered more a craftsperson than a creator. Nor is it above criticism. Art historian H. W. Janson, for example, has argued:

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[22] *Art in Action*, 51-52. For further reflection on the act of creating art, see Monroe C. Beardsley, "On the Creation of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 23 (1965): 291-304.

[23] See, for example, Dorothy Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," in *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World*, ed. Roderick Jellema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 69.

[24] For a helpful discussion of imagination, see "Toward a Theory of Imagination," in Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

> "Empirically, I should say 'creativity' is a mythic concept that claims an analogy between God, the paradigm of the true creator, and the artist, even though God, by definition, creates *ex nihilo* while the artist does no such thing. The concept was first applied in the 16th century, to and by artists who accepted this quasi-divine status, such as Michelangelo and Dürer. Since then, it has been so cheapened by overuse (we hear not only of new lipsticks 'created' by cosmetics experts but of the 'creativity' evidenced by children's drawings and even by those of chimpanzees) that the only thing to do is to leave it alone."[25]

This criticism simply faults our use of the English language for cheapening the wondrous action of artistic creativity. A deeper and more trenchant critique is offered by Calvin Seerveld:

> "If we think artists by profession are 'creators,' while mothers just have babies, we may be caught, unwittingly, in simply adapting, lightly christianized, the old nineteenth century idolatry of the artistic person as autonomous genius. The conception of artist as 'creator,' something like a superstar next to ordinary mortals, will not be free from the evil Romanticism that tends to elevate a given artist out of the bonds of community. And truly God-praising artistry can flourish only when the artist is deeply embedded both in an artistic community and in the wider, societal communion of sinning saints.[26]

Seerveld's critique and Wolterstorff's description, at the very least, point out that the image of artist as autonomous creator is culture-bound and not necessary to the artistic enterprise. It is but one image for an artist among a gallery of images evidenced in the history of human culture.

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[25] *Perspectives in Education, Religion, and the Arts*, Howard E. Kiefer and Milton K. Munitz, eds. (Albany, NY: 1970), 302

[26] Calvin Seerveld, *Rainbows for a Fallen World: Aesthetic Life and Artistic Task* (Downsview, Ontario: Toronto Tuppence Press, 1980), 26.

• The Artist in an Environment

Whether or not creativity is central to aesthetic and artistic making, whether or not it ought to be the central image of the artist, philosophical aesthetics has also helpfully described the external factors that inevitably shape the practice of artistic making. No act of creating or generating art happens in a vacuum. For every artist works in terms of (perhaps in concert with, perhaps in opposition to) a variety of external entities. For the purposes of this essay, four such factors warrant special attention.

First, artistic making is shaped by the *materials* out of which art arises. Perceptible, aesthetic entities share a materiality that inevitably contributes to their form. Musical performance depends on the physical condition of instruments. Sculpture depends on the condition of the clay. Architecture depends on the availability of certain materials. As Wolterstorff observes, "The work of art emerges from a *dialogue* between the artist and material," which comprises a "fascinating, mysterious, frustrating, exhilarating experience of being led along in conversation with one's material."[27] The materiality of art imposes a limit, a real force in artistic making that stands outside the subjectivity of the artist.

Second, artistic making is governed by the "deep grammar" of a particular medium or genre. As Gerardus van der Leeuw observed, "The artist, no matter how great and independent [she/]he may be, creates within the forms of the structure which was given [her/]him. It may be that [she/]he breaks through those forms at important points, that [she/]he perfects the form and its perfecter, like Beethoven for the symphony and Wagner for the opera, but even that proceeds from what is given."[28] Storytellers are compelled to work within the limits of both a spoken language and the genre in which they work: they are necessarily limited by the grammatical structure of a language—to place all the verbs at the end of an English sentence as in German, for example, would render their art meaningless. Similarly, the genre of storytelling imposes limitations: it is simply not allowed for a storyteller to begin with a discursive analysis on the metaphysical implications of storytelling. Every art form, every genre, every medium faces such limitations. Artistic making inherently occurs in terms of them.

Third, artistic making occurs in dialogue with conceptual activity. Aesthetic form or art may itself be defined as noncognitive, but it can hardly function or exist in isolation from human cognition. As Frank Burch Brown describes it, "when Dante responds to Aquinas, or when Bach responds to Lutheran and Pietistic theology, the result is a religious expression that is in some sense *post*-conceptual as well as pre-conceptual, and *post*-reflective as well as pre-reflective, because the art is significantly changed by the concepts and reflections it responds to and reinterprets."[29] Reflection on either the process of creativity, the technique of creating, or the "subject" of an intended artwork are all examples of how cognition interacts with creativity.

Fourth, artistic making occurs in community. "Since no person is an isolated entity," writes Burch Brown, "the mentality of a whole culture whose values and ideas are reflected and in some degree created in the knowledgeably made work."[30] Communities shape persons who shape artistic forms. Most non-Western art is as much the art of the community as it is of the artist. As Wolterstorff explains:

> "To understand the art of ancient and medieval South and Central America, the art of India, the art of medieval Europe, one must set off to the side our contemporary image of the alienated artist who has a prophetic insight to deliver or a stinging condemnation to issue to his fellow human beings, and one must instead see the artist as one who is allied in fundamental conviction with his community."[31]

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[27] *Art in Action*, 94-95.

[28] Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty*, trans. David Green (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 274.

[29] *Religious Aesthetics*, 43.

[30] *Religious Aesthetics*, 106.

[31] *Works and Worlds of Art*, 358.

But even in the West, communities provide an inevitable shaping influence on artistic making. Even if an artist intends to violate, to shape, to alter the nature of a community, the community is influencing art. A significant part of community is tradition. Paul Crowther's recent treatise has argued that creativity can only be understood in terms of tradition: "the continued creativity of art is bound up with specific work refining or innovating in relation to tradition."[32] Artists—like all human makers, thinkers, and doers—do not ever create in total isolation, without reference to what has gone before. Without community, both the artist and the artwork cannot function.[33]

At least these four factors that comprise the environment of the artist shape and influence the process of creating art. Though they may exert influence in varying degree, they are inevitable dimensions of artistic experience.

- **Art and World-Projection**

We turn now from the process and environment of creating to a process that inevitably attends or results from artistic making, that of world-projection or world-making. The language of world-projection betrays a Kantian heritage. Kant, in his massive critique of human knowing, posited that human subjectivity projects a structure on the world by which it knows the world. According to Roger Lundin, for Kant "*the world projected in a work of art* is nothing more and nothing less than the product of the human imagination, and as such, it can never be an accurate representation of reality."[34] The last part of this claim we will ignore for now. More interesting is the assumption that artworks "project worlds."[35]

A most penetrating discussion of this dimension of art has been offered by Nicholas Wolterstorff, who manages both to defend the importance of world-projection and to describe its intricacies without validating all of Kant's epistemological claims about human subjectivity.[36] Wolterstorff believes that an essential function or action of art is that of "using some artefact to project a world distinct from our actual world."[37] He celebrates that "God has created us with the marvelous ability to envisage states of affairs which we have never come across in actuality."[38] A paradigmatic example of such world-projection is that of fiction, by which an author imagines and portrays another world, related to but distinct from the real world. For Wolterstorff, such world-projection is a primary action of nearly every art form.

Every world projection, like every analogy or metaphor, involves both some resemblance and some nonresemblance to the actual world. Sometimes we revel at the degree of resemblance between the projected and real world ("that portrait looks exactly like her"). Sometimes we revel at the degree of nonresemblance ("that fantasy film was unreal"). But in every case, the interplay of real and unreal components provide the context for understanding how art bears meaning and how art affects its audience. As Wolterstorff describes it: "The artist, by his[/her] projection of worlds, alters and confirms us in our beliefs, such confirmation and alternation in turn altering our attitudes, our commitments, our actions. But also the artist, by his[/her] projection of worlds, affects our emotional life."[39] The single term "world projection" thus suggests a conception of art that accounts for important dimensions of both artistic creativity and reception.

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[32] Paul Crowther, *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 197.

[33] Similarly, artworks influence communities. Art can inspire, change, critique, or condone communities and their practices.

[34] Roger Lundin, *The Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith and the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 51. Italics mine.

[35] Similar theories of world-projection have been developed, as Burch Brown points out, by both Ernst Cassirer and Nelson Goodman.

[36] Wolterstorff's theory of world-projection is the central argument of his technical work, *Works and Worlds of Art*. It is summarized and placed in a larger philosophical and theological context as Part 3-Chapter 3 of his *Art in Action*. That he does not ascribe to all of Kant's epistemological assumptions is amply evidenced by Wolterstorff's own *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976, 1984), a deft turn on Kant's own contribution to philosophy of religion.

[37] *Works and Worlds of Art*, preface.

[38] *Art in Action*, 132.

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"Creativity" and "Liturgy" are terms that do not rest easily together. Certainly liturgy must be approached with disciplined imagination, attention to allusiveness, and awareness of new and unimagined possibilities. Yet Christian worship that relies on endless innovation—which is often implied in contemporary usage of the term "creativity"—quickly loses sight of both historic patterns and the biblical roots of Christian worship. In an important sense, the practice of Christian worship is more a *given* into which baptized persons are invited to grow than it is something that arises out of creative imagination.[40]

The relationship between creativity and liturgy has been explored most comprehensively of late by John Foley. In his *Creativity and the Roots of Liturgy*, Foley attempts "to pursue a systematic vision of the liturgy itself in its relation to aesthetics," that is, he relates theology of the liturgy to aesthetics.[41] His central theme is that both art and liturgy may be understood in terms of an analogy or metaphor of human conception, gestation, and birth, such that "artistic creation mimes human procreation" and likewise, liturgy resembles art, where "the Church-assembled serves as mother of the liturgical event." This metaphoric structure can be broken down into three processes: "the union of artist and world (conception), emergence of poetic knowledge from interior dark to the light of day (gestation), and the shape and structure of the work of art (birth and life outside of womb)."[42] Manipulating this metaphor allows Foley to probe the nature of a creative act (this in conversation with Maritain and Langer), and the procreative dimension of our union with the Trinitarian God in worship (this in conversation with LaCugna and van Beeck). Foley's analogy illuminates both the similarities and dissimilarities of liturgy to art. In terms of our discussion, they are alike in that both arise not out of solipsistic imagination, but in an encounter with external factors. But liturgy and art are also unlike, especially in liturgy's genesis in the encounter between the worshiping community and God. (For more on this, see "liturgy as art" in Section III of this report.)

While thinking of liturgy itself as creative may be problematic, philosophizing about artistic making in the particular liturgical arts is more fruitful. Especially helpful is the recognition of the external limits that shape the process of making in the liturgical arts. As mentioned above, materials, constraints of genre, the nature of community all shape the process of artistic making. A further external factor in the liturgical arts is the liturgy itself. The form, the logic, the meaning of Christian worship provides a decisive external limit for the thoughtful liturgical artist.

Finally, the notion that liturgy and its arts, like other aesthetic forms, projects a world is highly fruitful for further exploration. In his highly respected work in Old Testament theology, Walter Brueggemann refers frequently to the liturgy's "world-making" quality. For Brueggemann, "the liturgy does indeed make a world. The action of worship is indeed and unavoidably constructive."[43] Liturgy makes claims about God, about the world, and about redemption in Christ that quietly, but powerfully instills a worldview in Christian worshipers.

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[39] *Works and Worlds of Art*, 365

[40] Some allowance must be made here for the variety within Christian liturgy. Creativity is certainly more encouraged among worship traditions that do not rely on fixed liturgical texts than among those with fixed texts and patterns of liturgical celebration.

[41] John Foley, *Creativity and the Roots of Liturgy* (Washington, D. C.: The Pastoral Press, 1994), 5. See the discussion in the *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy*, 1994 Annual Meeting (Valparaiso, IN: North American Academy of Liturgy, Inc.: 1994), 75-76.

[42] *Creativity and the Roots of Liturgy*, 9, 11, 41, respectively.

[43] Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 157.

2) Aesthetic and Artistic Objects

We shift our focus now from the artist to the artwork itself, to things one can learn, know, and bring to art once it has been separated from the artist and the act of creating.

- **Materiality and Contemporaneity of Art and *Aesthetica***

As alluded to above, what is common to all art and all objects of aesthetic import is that they are material in some sense. Even music involves sound waves that physically interact with membranes in our ears. And yet it can appear that aesthetics as a discipline is concerned with everything but the physical. As Wolterstorff argues, "it is not only tempting but customary to speak in lofty abstract tones about art—to spiritualize it, etherealize it, dematerialize it.[44] The relationship between materiality and spirituality has, of course, significant theological ramifications (see Section II of this report). For now, suffice it to say that any comprehensive aesthetic theory must acknowledge the fundamental and inevitable materiality involved in artistic and aesthetic works.

Not only is art perceptible; it is also contemporaneous. As H. G. Gadamer has argued, "The reality of the work of art and its expressive power cannot be restricted to its original historical horizon, in which the beholder was actually the contemporary of the creator. It seems instead to belong to the experience of art that the work of art always has its own present."[45] Though Rembrandt's paintings evoked important and unique responses in the age in which they were painted, those same paintings still evoke responses today (though undoubtedly not the identical ones as before). Art works are rendered in time, but are not limited in their expression to the age in which they were created. They have a "presence" about them that transcends time and even culture. Attending to how particular works are transfigured over time is an important component of understanding art itself.[46]

- **Distinguishable Aspects of Art and Aesthetic Form**

Beyond observing the materiality and contemporaneity of art, philosophical aesthetics describes the various features of art and aesthetic objects that are subject to analysis. Nearly all theorists have their own particular terminology and method of describing the features of art and aesthetic forms, but most theories make at least three levels of distinction.

(1) *The individual elements of a medium.* In painting, these include at least line, shape, color, and texture. In music, these include at least intervals, rhythms, and tone colors.

(2) *The way that individual elements are related.* In most art forms, these can be described using the traditional terms of unity, balance, rhythm, proportion. Often these elements are turned into criteria for evaluating art, such as Aquinas's criteria of integrity/unity, proportion/harmony, clarity/radiance.[47]

(3) *The relationship of the artwork to its meaning.* Thus, in most artworks, *form* is distinguished from *content* which are both distinguished from *style*.

Nearly every basic textbook describes these and related elements of artworks.

- **Form—Significant and Symbolic**

One of these elements, form, warrants special attention, however, both because of its centrality to the process of conveying meaning through art and because it has been important in recent liturgical studies. Form, of course, is a very basic category, referring to relations among component parts of a given artistic medium and/or to the structures or patterns which govern the creative process. It is a necessary part of art. All arts, including music, fiction, and architecture, are analyzed according to form.

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[44] *Art in Action*, 91.

[45] H. G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 95-104. See also *Truth and Method,* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 112, where he mentions preaching and the Mass as examples of how contemporaneity is established in religious terms.

[46] Knowing the history of reception of Bach's music, for example, not only sheds light on the history of Western musical sensibilities, but also on the works themselves and on component parts of these works that may be highlighted in particular periods of history.

[47] See the entry on Aquinas in the lexicon in this issue of *Liturgy Digest*.

Aesthetician Clive Bell is associated with the frequently cited coinage "significant form." Bell argued that it was the one unique feature which defines art: "There must be some one quality without which a work of art cannot exist; possessing which, in the least degree, no work is altogether worthless. What is this quality . . . Only one answer seems possible—significant form. In each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions.[48] For Bell, then, it is the *combination* of the elements of art (lines, colors, etc.) that elicits what he calls "aesthetic emotion" and thus constitute significant form.

In her aesthetic theory, Suzanne Langer, in continuity and contrast to Bell, spoke of art as "*symbolic* form," arguing that art represents nondiscursively and symbolically the form of human emotions. Langer defined art as "the creation of forms symbolic of feeling." As observed earlier, she believed that artworks reveal, represent, even express the emotional experience of the artist through the particular symbolic forms of the various artistic media. What is significant here is that it is artistic *form* that communicates that meaning. For Langer, form also involved the combination of elements or, in her words, "the interaction of colors, lines, surfaces, lights and shadows."[49]

Though there are many differences between Bell and Langer, and many particular implications of their systems which are debatable (if not generally discounted) in current debate, their theories remain influential for focusing on particular aspects of the artwork itself in conveying meaning. Since their work, the formal aspects of art have continued to be important topics for

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[48] Clive Bell, *Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), 17-18.

[49] *Problems of Art*, 128.

theorists and critics alike.[50]

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Like art, liturgy is tangible, perceptible. Words are spoken, artifacts are manipulated, sounds are generated. Just as art can be talked about as if what is most important is the idea of art, so too liturgical discourse can dematerialize liturgical celebration. Docetic art and docetic liturgy are related possible pitfalls that may attend theoretical discussion. This materiality is observed by Don Saliers: "liturgy has an aesthetic range, and this has to do with the well-formed, the beautiful, and the sensate activities of how we come to know God through the created order."[51]

Also like art, liturgy creates meaning through the manipulation of form. This is reflected recently in the work of both Don Saliers and Gordon Lathrop. Thus Saliers echoes Langer with frequent references to liturgy's "significant form."[52] And Lathrop contends that "[liturgical] meaning may be found most deeply in the arranged pattern, and that pattern is to be seen as proposing a way to understand the world as an ordered whole."[53] Understanding the form of liturgy is crucial for understanding its meaning and significance.

3) Appropriating Aesthetic and Artistic Works

Our final topic in this tripartite analysis of the components of aesthetic experience is certainly the largest and most complex. It comprises the full range of activities that are involved in appropriating aesthetic and art works. This process includes the activities described by following gerunds: seeing, viewing, considering, appreciating, liking, disliking, critiquing, and judging. That so many words describe some aspect of appropriating aesthetic and art forms attests to the complexity and variety of aesthetic and artistic experience. Noticing these complexities and their interrelations inevitably enriches aesthetic experience and stands as one of the primary contributions of philosophical aesthetics.

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[50] For a discussion of the essential topics associated with "form," see David Pole "The Excellence of Form in Works of Art," in *Aesthetics: Form and Emotion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 79-100.

[51] Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 213.

[52] See, for example, *Worship As Theology*, 214.

[53] Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 206.

- **Components of the Appropriation of Aesthetic and Art Forms**

Philosophical aesthetics begins by distinguishing various levels of aesthetic appropriation. At least four levels are described (or assumed) in most writings.

(1) *Perception.* It is perhaps perfectly obvious, but nonetheless important to observe that the experience of aesthetics begins with perception. The Greek term *aisthetikos* meant "perceptible." Whatever the modality—whether through seeing, hearing, smelling, or touching—aesthetic experience begins with an act of perception.

(2) *Immediate Response.* Aesthetic perception evokes a response. Often such a response is immediate, unpremeditated, almost instinctive. Aesthetic forms evoke emotion, stimulate imagination, generate particular associations, even control psychophysiological responses. Chronicling and analyzing these immediate responses has long been the domain of philosophical aesthetics. Plato observed how art can arouse people to various actions, either good or bad. Aristotle described the cathartic value of art, noticing how art causes an audience to feel certain deep emotions, which they experience in an aesthetic context that guards them from the full negative effects of such emotion in daily life, in effect purging or cleansing the audience. Focusing less on actions or discreet emotions, some recent theories have argued that the goal of art is to generate an immediate response of "aesthetic enjoyment," or delight.

Particularly interesting to those interested in religious aesthetics are the class of immediate responses that are described in terms like "being moved" or "being inspired." Philosophical aesthetics is replete with personal narratives of intense aesthetic experiences, narratives with an urgency, poignancy, and passion that speak to such a condition. Consider the following testimony by Paul Tillich, who described seeing the originals of artworks that he had contemplated while a military chaplain in the trenches during World War I:

> "But at the end of the war I still had never seen the original paintings in all their glory. Going to Berlin, I hurried to the Kaiser Freidrich Museum. There on the wall was a picture that had comforted me in battle: *Madonna [and Child] with Singing Angels* painted by Sandro Botticelli in the fifteenth century.
>
> "Gazing up at it, I felt a state approaching ecstasy. In the beauty of the painting was Beauty itself. It shone through the colors of the pain as the light of day shines through the stained-glass windows of a medieval church.
>
> "As I stood there, bathed in the beauty its painter had envisioned so long ago, something of the divine source of all things came through to me. I turned away shaken.
>
> "That moment has affected my whole life, given me the keys for the interpretation of human existence, brought vital joy and spiritual truth."[54]

Such experiences have been described by even the most stubbornly anti-religious theorists. Like artistic imagination, it is an experience that is elusive, difficult to pin down or analyze.

(3) *Interpretation.* Following the action of perceiving and the attending initial response, the process of appropriating aesthetic and artistic forms inevitably involves interpretation, determining what they mean and why they might be significant. Here as perception becomes interpretation, aesthetics becomes hermeneutics.

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[54] Paul Tillich, "One Moment of Beauty," in *Art and Architecture*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 234.

The process of interpretation, in fact, is bound up in every aspect of appropriating aesthetic forms, including perception itself. For "always when we approach a work of art we focus on some features and allow others to recede into the penumbra of our attention."[55] Thus, when we look at visual art, we are always *looking for* particular things. When we listen to music, we are *listening for* particular aspects of the music. The very act of looking and listening—and all perceiving—involves a selectivity that begins the process of interpretation. And what shapes looking and listening for? Many of the same factors that shape artistic making in the first place: the community in which the aesthetic experience occurs and its valued ideals, other artworks in similar and related genres, and what artists and critics alike tell people they are supposed to attend to.[56] Reflection on hermeneutics has, of course, been one of the large intellectual projects of the twentieth century, one that has attempted to analyze and theorize about these and other factors in the process of interpretation. Whereas many hermeneutic theories have been applied only to literary texts, the very same questions and issues that surface in debates about the interpretation of the Gospel of Mark or a passage of Shakespeare or Milton pertain directly to the interpretation of other aesthetic and artistic forms.

(4) *Evaluation.* In appropriating art or aesthetic forms, one perceives, intuitively responds, interprets, and finally, evaluates. Judgments about artworks are perhaps as inevitable as making them in the first place. Some works are good. Some are bad. Some are profound, mysterious, or disciplined. Others are maudlin, contrived, or disposable. Everyone makes aesthetic judgments; critics make a living doing so.

In reflecting on this process of evaluation, it is important to distinguish two levels or types of evaluation. On one level, works are evaluated in terms of personal preference. Judgments are made about whether or not one *likes* the work or not. On another level, works are evaluated in terms of their merits, how they meet certain criteria, or how they perform certain functions. A critic may intensely dislike a work, but nevertheless admit that it is successful in meeting a particular criterion. Suffice it to say for now that distinguishing these two levels of evaluation is both extremely difficult to maintain consistently and necessary for informed aesthetic discourse.

The matter of rendering judgment raises what may be the most vexing question in all of philosophical aesthetics: by what criteria does one judge aesthetic and artistic forms? Are there external criteria for rendering authentic aesthetic judgments? Or is beauty only in the eye of the beholder? More on this will follow.

- **Particular Theories of Aesthetic and Artistic Experience**

These components of aesthetic appropriation are only rarely outlined as they have been in the preceding section. Most often they are described and analyzed in the development of particular theories about what lies at the essence of aesthetic experience, a discussion which comprises the heart of philosophical aesthetics. The following paragraphs briefly describe four theories of aesthetic appropriation, those of Kant, Gadamer, Wolterstorff, and Burch Brown, and then summarize the debate over the highly contested issue of aesthetic taste. This is but a slim introduction to a vast range of theories especially in twentieth century aesthetics, but one that still raises some important questions for our larger, liturgical purposes.

(1) *"Aesthetic Attitude"—Kant and His Heirs*

Among the chief legacies of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is his purist notion of aesthetic experience. Kant argued that aesthetic experience involves contemplating the particularly aesthetic features of a given art work or aesthetic object. Both the verb and object of this sentence are important.

The action here described is one of disinterested observation. According to Burch Brown, Kant posited that "our discernment of the beautiful is disinterested, non-cognitive, and amoral . . .Kant's thesis [is] that the beautiful is inherently isolated from moral, theoretical, and practical interests."[57] Attending to works of art in a particularly aesthetic way involves bracketing everything besides the aesthetic features of art, including economic and historical factors or the purpose for which the artwork was intended. Thus, when one perceives a church building, for example, one can attend to any number of aspects, properties, or characteristics of it. One may perceive its design, the engineering that made it possible to build, the type of liturgical action it suits, or any number of other features. But aesthetic contemplation, the argument goes, attends not to all these factors, but only the aesthetic factors.

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[55] *Art in Action*, 113.

[56] On this last point, as Wolterstorff points out, critics assist us in "acquiring new sensibilities . . . the critic guides us in our contemplation" (*Art in Action*, 31).

The uniqueness of such aesthetic factors has subsequently been the object of a good deal of debate among aestheticians. Clive Bell, for example, argued that there was "a particular kind of emotion provoked by works of visual art."[58] George Dickie disagreed, arguing that there is no unique dimension of experience that can be called aesthetic.[59] Monroe Beardsley identified a unique aesthetic experience in terms of mental activity and the form of an aesthetic object.[60] Often, these claims to the uniqueness of aesthetic experience are linked with claims about the ultimate value of art for art's sake. The importance of Kant's legacy in philosophical aesthetics, as in epistemology, would be difficult to overstate. Most works since then have either assumed much of Kant's reasoning and terminology, or felt the need to

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[57] *Religious Aesthetics*, 25. For more on Kant's theory, see Mary A. McCloskey, *Kant's Aesthetic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

[58] Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914, 1931), 6.

[59] See *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). Dickie defines art not in terms of aesthetics, but in terms of the institutions that support the fine arts.

[60] "A person is having an aesthetic experience during a particular stretch of time if and only if the greater part of his mental activity during that time is united and made pleasurable by being tied to the form and qualities of a sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object on which his primary attention is concentrated." Monroe C. Beardsley, "Aesthetic Experience Regained," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28 (1969): 8.

respond to it. These few sentences are surely an overly simplistic statement of his work, but nevertheless point to the important central theme of aesthetic contemplation as a primary means for the reception of art.

(2) *The Playfulness of Aesthetic Experience—Gadamer*

Perhaps more helpful than discussions about certain unique aspects of aesthetic experience are attempts to propose metaphors for the experience itself. The focus in this instance is not on defining the limits or boundaries of one's experience of or reception of art or *aesthetica*, but rather on illuminating a particularly salient feature of this experience. A provocative example of this is provided by H. G. Gadamer, in the course of his treatise on hermeneutics, *Truth and Method*. Gadamer began his treatise by examining the experience and interpretation of art as it provides insights into human interpretation in general. Along the way (and here I am extracting but one small point from a complex argument), Gadamer proposed an analogy between art and play, between artworks and games. He suggested that experiencing art is much like participating in a game, especially with respect to the fact that "play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in his play." The experience of art, like play, can only occur when common rules are assumed and when art is taken as seriously as a player takes a game. Then, in that context, an artwork can perform its true function: "The work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience changing the person who experiences it. The 'subject' of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it, but the work itself."[61] The religious significance of this language is readily apparent: the experience of art changes, even *converts*, the person who experiences it. Gadamer's theory is much more complex than this, of course. This analogy of art to play is used not just to explicate aesthetic experience, but to describe the ontological status of artworks in relation to human consciousness.

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[61] H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 92.

Students of Gadamer will profit not only from his important work in hermeneutics *per se*, but also from his application of hermeneutics to aesthetic experience.

(3) *Wolterstorff's Critique of Contemplation*

Nicholas Wolterstorff's discussion of the appropriation of art begins with a sturdy critique of Kant's legacy on the institution of fine arts. Our thinking about art, he contends, "has in large measure been determined by the social realities of the role of art in a certain segment of our society. You and I are participants in what I shall call our society's institution of high art. Our participation in this situation has cast a spell over us."[62] This spell has several important implications. First, we are generally given to assume that art is for contemplation.[63] Second, art is separated from much of everyday life, housed as it is in "special separated rooms and buildings—concert halls, art galleries, theaters, reading rooms," and experienced primarily in time dedicated to "leisure." Third, these tendencies tend to confirm sociological patterns that relegate the arts to a cultural elite.[64] As he observes, this veneration for artistic contemplation tends to ignore how the arts have functioned in nearly every culture of any age, where art was simply a given of everyday existence, an important corollary to nearly every human activity, including those that merely maintained basic levels of subsistence. Art has accompanied rearing children, hunting game, growing crops, cultivating friendships, building

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[62] *Art in Action*, 11. Importantly for our purposes, Wolterstorff contends that "The strength of the bewitchment is evident from the fact that it is effective even in the face of the immense importance of liturgical art in the Christian community" (67).

[63] "No matter what the art, . . the action that you and I tend to regard as intended is a species of what I shall call *perceptual contemplation* . . .Virtually every statement concerning the purposes of the arts which comes from the hands of our aestheticians, our art theorists, our critics, makes this assumption. Only among anthropologists is there significant resistance to the consensus. Yet the assumption is surely false" (*Art in Action*, 10); see also 24.

[64] *Art in Action*, 25. "A striking feature of how the arts occur in our society is that there is among us a cultural elite, and that from the totality of works of art to be found in our society a vast number are used (in a way intended by the artist or distributor) almost exclusively by the members of that elite" (22).

shelters, organizing societies, and praying to gods. Every aspect of life has an aesthetic dimension. Limiting theoretical and societal resources to the small segment of human activity encompassed by the leisured cultural elite both restricts our concept of aesthetic knowing and ultimately impoverishes what we believe art and aesthetic experience can accomplish.

Wolterstorff's is surely not the only critique of aesthetic contemplation.[65] In fact, it has become increasingly common to speak of engaged participation in artistic reception, language with an entirely different feel than disinterested contemplation.[66]

(4) *Frank Burch Brown and the Aesthetic Milieu*

Frank Burch Brown's argument, like Wolterstorff's, contends that limiting aesthetic appropriation to the contemplation of only aesthetic features unnecessarily limits the range of aesthetic experience. He laments the modernist, purist assumption that "tends to think of an experience or object as either aesthetic or non-aesthetic." He is particularly interested in how supposedly nonaesthetic factors interact and condition more purely aesthetic factors, arguing for an "integralist notion of the aesthetic." In his words,

> "Clearly a better model for thinking about aesthetic experience would be one that allowed for the integrity and uniqueness of works of art or aesthetic objects without completely severing their connection with what is not already inherently artistic or aesthetic. This would allow us to justify

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[65] The critique of purist theories is now increasingly common. See, for example, Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatic Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), who attempts to free aesthetics "from its exalted cloister" (viii). Shusterman's work includes a chapter on popular art and another on rap.

[66] Berleant offers an alternative to "disinterested contemplation" in his discussion of the role of "participatory engagement" in the appreciation of art. He notices that the isolation of the art object and disinterested contemplation for which traditional "purist" aesthetic theories rarely occur. Then he argues for "replacing disinterestedness with engagement and contemplation with participation" (*Art and Engagement*, 4).

> in theory our common perception that, for example, the beauty and sublimity of Chartres Cathedral—its grace, dizzying height, and powerful integrity—*are at once aesthetic and religious*, with its religious import modifying its aesthetic impact, and vice versa."

Burch Brown thinks dialectically, synthetically, aware of many possible meanings. He is aware of how meaning is transfigured by relationships among various dimensions or components of a given work and he senses the need to perceive multiple layers of meaning via interdisciplinary study. In short, he is interested in the "creation and transformation for meaning through aesthetic media." This process of modification is central in Burch Brown's thinking, as witnessed by his frequent use of the near synonyms "interact," "interanimates," and "transfigures" to speak this process. Thus, for Burch Brown the aesthetic "interanimates and consorts with other things in such a way that all are in some measure changed by their mutual relations." This approach has the advantage of taking into account the social context, the perceived intention of the artist/creator, or any other set of factors into consideration in a work. It makes program notes a meaningful exercise, for example—or for that matter, catechesis about liturgy.[67]

The multiple meanings that interact with aesthetic meanings in what Burch Brown calls "the aesthetic milieu."[68] That is, all *aesthetica* have a context which in part determines their meaning and significance. For Burch Brown, this milieu itself is not primarily aesthetic, but is of inestimable consequence for the perception of the work. For every aesthetic object is "transformed in the aesthetic milieu." His examples are illuminating (and liturgically significant): consider the difference between walking into the Chartres cathedral and the replica of the same at Disney world; or between hearing Mozart's *Laudate Dominum* in a concert hall or at vespers in a church.

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[67] Passages in this paragraph are from *Religious Aesthetics*, pages 31, 90, 33 (italics mine), 43, 77. On this integralist notion, see also David Chidester, "Aesthetic Strategies in Western Religious Thought," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (1984): 55-66.

[68] *Religious Aesthetics*, 74-76.

For one, the milieu determines how one attends to a work, what one listens or looks for. It changes, to some extent, the way the perceiving subject approaches the work of art. For another, it changes the work itself. Changing the context of a painting changes its lighting; changing the context of a piece of music changes its acoustical environment. The works as they are perceived are influenced by their context.

But the physical context for an artwork is only one aspect of its aesthetic milieu. Equally important for the bearing of meaning is the perceiving subject. The attitudes and thoughts someone brings to a work are significant in determining how the particularly aesthetic features of the work will be experienced: "What one *makes of* an aestheticon, religiously, surely will depend partly on concerns, values, and expectations that one brings to the experience, and not only on factors immediately associated with the work itself." One component of this is "reflective mind." For thinking about art is surely not to do injustice to it. In Burch Brown's words, "by and large aesthetic/artistic construals and constructions of our world(s) exist in dialogical relation to the constructs of conceptual and propositional thought."[69]

(5) *Debated Territory: Aesthetic Taste*

Surely every person's approach to either artworks or to aesthetic experience is colored by what might be called "taste," the faculty of discerning what is right, fitting, excellent and beautiful. Taste was a primary topic for aesthetic theory in eighteenth-century Britain, generating important essays by, among others, Francis Hutcheson and David Hume. Nineteenth-century thinkers such as Schopenhauer preferred to describe instead what they termed "aesthetic attitude." Central to both was the ideal of disinterested contemplation as the key to artistic appreciation.

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[69] *Religious Aesthetics*, 58, 100.

The varieties of theories about both taste and aesthetic attitude diverge in their various views of the subject-object relationship. Some contend that beauty is entirely in the eye of beholder, where beauty depends upon being perceived by a subject who looks with the intent to see beauty.[70] Others contend that beauty resides in the object itself which a well-developed sense of taste (or aesthetic attitude) is able to perceive.

One of the most frequently anthologized essays on taste is David Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste." Hume observed what is surely the bane of many a liturgical leader, that is, "the great variety of taste . . . which prevails in the world," where even "the sentiments of men [and women] often differ with regard to beauty and deformity of all kinds, even while their general discourse is the same." He then argued that standards of taste are subjective, but yet that "amidst all the variety and caprice of taste there are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind." He contended that qualified critics are likely to agree on their assessment of the relative value of a particular artwork, but that "few are qualified to given judgment on any work of art or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty."[71]

Immanuel Kant attempted valiantly to hold together a subjective and objective dimension to taste. He defined taste as "the faculty of judging an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful." The determination of aesthetic value thus rests on the exercise of such a faculty and is subjective. Yet Kant wanted to claim that humans share common sensitivity for discerning aesthetic pleasure: "For the principle which concerns the agreement of different judging persons, although only subjective, is yet assumed as subjectivity universal (an idea necessary for

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[70] Clive Bell, for example, simply asserts, "any system of aesthetics which pretends to be based on some objective truth is so palpably ridiculous as not to be worth discussing" (*Art*, 38).

[71] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Art and Philosophy*, ed. W. E. Kennick, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 486, 490, 495.

everyone), and thus can claim universal assent (as if it were objective) . . ."[72]

Hume, Kant and nearly every theorist since has attempted to assert the essential role of human subjectivity in making aesthetic judgments without allowing for a chaotic relativism that considers all aesthetic judgments equally valid. Most recent attempts to solve this dilemma appeal not to universals, nor to individual private subjective judgments, but to the importance of a community. Burch Brown, for example, argues for such a communal orientation, which looks for "inter-subjective agreement," where "a community of taste shares standards and understandings that make mutual experience and internal dialogue possible."[73] The similarity between this theory and a variety of postmodern theologies, such as George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, is readily apparent. This is but one manifestation of the large twentieth-century project of reconciling epistemological subjectivity with the possibility of making normative and prescriptive statements in the field of theology as well as in philosophy. Although the nature of truth claims advanced by various postmodern theorists continues to be a hotly debated topic, the emphasis on community and the cultural particularities of various communities is a step forward from an appeal to only individual subjectivity as a referee of aesthetic value.

LITURGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Liturgical participation and art appreciation are much alike: they both involve perception and they both involve engagement with their respective media. Yet they are also very much different, especially in terms of the language of much of philosophical aesthetics. Perhaps most problematic is the language of "disinterested contemplation" (note how the adjective transforms a term that is valued in the history of Christian spirituality).

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[72] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, in *Art and Philosophy*, ed. W. E. Kennick, 501-521. Quotations are from 505 and 521. For a recent engagement with Kant's treatment of taste, see Charles Wegener, *The Discipline of Taste and Feeling* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[73] *Religious Aesthetics*, 149. For his discussion of Kant, see 138ff.

Although one suspects that some worshipers might prefer it, such disinterestedness is about as far away from "full, active, and conscious participation" as the English language allows us to express. Perhaps the term "contemplation" itself is not so bad in some common usage (see, for example, its use in *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship,* par. 12, 20). But given the history of the philosophical discussion it is problematic. Especially when yoked with the notion of "psychic distance" that some philosophers use to describe the contemplative act, it is a far cry from active engagement. In this context, Wolterstorff's critique of the institution of fine arts and its promotion of disinterested contemplation raises important questions for liturgy: Is liturgical art intended for contemplation? Is liturgical art to be relegated to leisure as are the fine arts? Is liturgical art to be separated from everyday life as a museum is from a place of work?

In contrast to the tradition of disinterested contemplation, Gadamer's explication of aesthetic experience proposes more fruitful analogues for liturgy. For the analogy of art to play (in terms of its ability to create a world) may be a helpful way of lending some depth to the frequent comparisons of liturgy to play. Following Huizinga's *homo ludens*, liturgists have often spoken of liturgy as a form of play.[74] Gadamer's use of the metaphor calls attention to the way in which a game presents an alternate world for the subject to inhabit. It values the game itself as an objective presence over against the subject. Yet it always remains aware of the tensive quality of the metaphor: art must not be equated, but only compared to play. Such is also the case with liturgy.

Also important is Burch Brown's contention that aesthetic and nonaesthetic factors are necessarily inter-related in the perceiving of art forms. For just as artworks are complex combinations of aesthetic, social, political, and religious meaning, so too liturgy presents such a complex array of meanings. Vestments, for example, are at once a symbol of power (political), a sign of office or vocation (religious), and an artefact of beauty (aesthetic). These levels of meaning mutually enrich each other (for more on this, see Section III, below—the aesthetic dimension of liturgy).[75]

Finally there is the complex question of "liturgical taste," or in more traditional, theological terminology "liturgical discernment." Liturgists are constantly faced with the simple fact that people have very different notions of what is good, right, and beautiful. Is there some way of acknowledging and condoning this diversity, while nevertheless retaining some notion of the Ideal? Or is taste to be determined purely democratically? These questions have direct bearing on styles of liturgical leadership and patterns of liturgical inculturation. As in philosophical aesthetics, objective and subjective standards for taste or discernment are difficult to hold in tension. In general, community-oriented, intersubjective standards may be emerging in liturgical writings, much along the lines suggested by Burch Brown.

Thus ends our brief foray into the discipline of philosophical aesthetics. It must be stressed that the preceding analysis could only begin to raise a few of the many questions posed by philosophical aesthetics. My intention was simply to provide a working outline for delineating the parameters of aesthetic experience.

II. THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

Whether and how "Beauty" is a liturgical virtue is ultimately a theological question. Theology contributes to our move toward a liturgical aesthetic in variety of ways. Theology is used to defend the arts and to suggest norms for their liturgical use. Theology has influenced the development of art forms and the worldview out of which artistic making has emerged. Theology has itself used aesthetic language, borrowing from philosophical aesthetics and transforming this aesthetic language in the process. These various intersections between theology and aesthetics have recurred time and time again throughout the history of Christianity. But they have often remained on the periphery of theological discourse. For this reason, few attempts have been made to outline the full scope of these intersections, much less to apply them to a distinctly liturgical aesthetic. The following analysis hopes to raise questions and suggest lines of inquiry that may lead to such an effort.

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[74] See Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, Life* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 26-27; Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930), and others in Wainwright's notes.

[75] On the political dimension of symbolic and aesthetic meaning, see Aidan J. Kavanagh, "The Politics of Symbol and Art in Liturgical Expression," in *Symbol and Art in Worship,* Concilium 132, ed. Luis Maldonado and David Power (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 28-39.

Unlike the first section of this report, this second section will not attempt a comprehensive outline of the topics discussed in theological aesthetics. The nature of the literature in the field simply resists any attempt at such an effort.[76] Rather, this section will identify and briefly discuss six discrete topics treated in theological aesthetics, pointing the reader to relevant literature for further study. None of the following summaries are complete, but they suggest connections among often separate lines of inquiry. As in section one, brief excurses regarding the liturgical implications of these discussions will be inserted into the text.

A. *Beauty and the Divine*

A first and central topic in theological aesthetics concerns the use of explicitly aesthetic language—the language of beauty—to describe God or religious experience. Such aesthetic language is often carried over into descriptions of and prescriptions for liturgical experience. Of these uses of aesthetic language, the most crucial and paradigmatic is the use of aesthetic

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[76] Among the few efforts to survey the field are Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), and James Alfred Martin, Jr. *Beauty and Holiness: The Dialogue Between Aesthetics and Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

language to describe God. The Christian tradition has produced writings in which "beauty" and "divinity" have variously been conflated, set against each other, related by analogy, and also (to be honest) confused with each other. Noticing the implications of the various possible relations between these terms is a necessary step in the development of a liturgical aesthetic.

The following paragraphs make brief observations about the historic origins of the inter-relation of aesthetic and theological language and then summarize the contributions of four modern theologians—Jonathan Edwards, Paul Tillich, Gerardus van der Leeuw and Hans Urs von Balthasar.[77] This summary points to both unity and variety in theological aesthetics. Each theologian has in common the use of aesthetic language and a distinct respect for human perception in the quest for theological precision. Yet each operates out of a fundamentally different philosophical worldview and arrives at different conclusions about the aesthetic dimension of the Christian faith.

As Eric Werner pointed out a generation ago, the use of the concept of "Beauty" in the Christian tradition is certainly the result of Hellenistic influence.[78] One finds few analogous discussions emerging out of the Hebraic worldview.[79] Gerhard von Rad even argued that "Israel lacked all critical reflection on the phenomenon of beauty and on artistic reproduction as such."[80] The linking of beauty and divinity in Western thought is surely a Platonic legacy. In Plato's scheme the contemplation of beauty is one important means of approaching the ultimate Good.[81] Given the metaphysical assumptions of the Platonic worldview, the effect of this assertion is two-fold: first, aesthetic categories are elevated to bear fundamental, even transcendental, weight; second, material manifestations of the beautiful are relegated to derivative status, serving only as approximations of the good. At once there is an appreciation for aesthetics and a depreciation for art. It is this line of thinking that can be directly traced from Plato to Plotinus to Augustine and thus into the Christian tradition.

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[77] For a more comprehensive look at the history of theological aesthetics, see volumes 2, 3, and 4 of von Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord* (San Fransico: Ignatius, 1982).

[78] Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 315.

[79] Note that the familiar text "Worship God *in the beauty of holiness*," must not be understood in terms of the Platonic sense of "beauty."

[80] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), vol. 1, 277. Balthasar takes the concept of "glory" as an aesthetic category in the old covenant, which he examines in volume 6 of *The Glory of the Lord*.

[81] Martin, *Beauty and Holiness*, 15.

Augustine frequently relied upon the power and persuasiveness of aesthetic experience and language: "Late have I loved Thee, Beauty, ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved Thee."[82] In Robert O'Connell's summary, "from first to last, he [Augustine] strives to fire our hearts with longing for the beauty that lured him throughout his life, the Beauty whose name, he ultimately was led to see, was God."[83] Augustine's view of Beauty was pristine, exalted, and—importantly—otherworldly. In line with the Platonic legacy he inherited, Augustine valued aesthetic categories, but saw material beauty as only a means to a higher end, not worthy in and of itself. Again in O'Connell's summary: "created beauties, whether natural or artistic, must consent to be placed in service, reduced to objects of use rather than of genuine enjoyment."[84] Every material beauty could and should lead the soul to the Highest Good, the Ultimate Beauty, the First Cause.

Thomas Aquinas extended and amplified the unity of aesthetic and theological categories. At times, God and "the beautiful" are virtually equated: "the beautiful—that is, God—is the ultimate source and goal of all things."[85] Beauty, for Aquinas, joins truth and goodness at the epitome of metaphysical reality. Being itself participates in Beauty. Further, Thomas delineated the structure of beauty, defining it in terms of a triumvirate of virtues: integrity, harmony, and clarity—an influential definition down to the present day.[86] He argued that form was central and foundational in aesthetics and art.[87] And he valued the potential for material arts, including poetry, to embody and convey meaning. Thomas' discussion of aesthetic categories ranks as a remarkable comprehensive account of central issues in philosophical aesthetics. Yet always in Thomas' larger vision, aesthetics had primarily theological outworkings. Beauty was a fundamental way of describing and understanding divine reality.

Thus, through Augustine and Aquinas, aesthetic language earned a permanent, if relatively minor, role in theological discourse down to the present day. No serious theological aesthetics can ignore their decisive influence, nor the ways in which they assumed and then modified their respective Platonic and Aristotelian influences.

(1) *Jonathan Edwards*

Perhaps surprisingly, one of the modern theologians most attuned to the language of beauty in expressing divine reality was Jonathan Edwards.[88]

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[82] *Confessions* X.38.

[83] Robert J. O'Connell, S.J., *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 1. See the entries on Augustine and Plato in Report 2 below.

[84] *ibid*, 145.

[85] See the entry on Aquinas in Report 2 below.

[86] *Summa Theologiae,* I.39.8. See discussions in Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas,* trans. H. Bredin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); and Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages,* trans. H. Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). Thomas' influence in aesthetics has been mediated in the twentieth century primarily in the work of Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson. See Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism,* trans. J. W. Evans (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974); and *Art and Poetry,* tr. E. de P. Matthew (New York: Philosophical Library, 1943).

[87] Thomas' vision is captured in the following influential section from the *Summa:* "For good (being what all things desire) has to do properly with desire and so involves the idea of end (since desire is a kind of movement towards something). Beauty, on the other hand, has to do with knowledge, and we call a thing beautiful when it pleases the eye of the beholder. This is why beauty is matter of right proportion, for the senses delight in rightly proportioned things as similar to themselves, the sense-faculty being a sort of proportion itself like all other knowing faculties. Now since knowing proceeds by imaging, and images have to do with form, beauty properly involves the notion of form." *Summa Theologiae,* I.5.4.

[88] On Edward's conception of beauty, see Diana Butler, "God's Visible Glory: The Beauty of Nature in the Thought of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 13-26; Paul Conkin, *Puritans and Pragmatists: Eight Eminent American Thinkers* (New York, 1968), 39-72; Roland Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, Conn., 1968); Sang Hyun Lee, "Mental Activity and the Perception of Beauty in Jonathan Edwards," *Harvard Theological Review* 69 (1976), 369-396; and William C. Spohn, "Sovereign Beauty: Jonathan Edwards and the Nature of True Virtue," *Theological Studies* 42 (1981): 394-421.

Usually known only as the dour preacher of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," more representative of Edwards's writings are gripping accounts of the vitality of God's gracious action in the world. These are often expressed in explicitly aesthetic terms. Edwards's talk of beauty, like that of his theological forebear Calvin, was linked with his high view of creation. As Martin explains it, "Edwards made the daring and powerful move of employing the notion of types and tropes to portray the world of nature described in science as a world of 'images or shadows or divine things.' . . . The controlling term for a conceptual expression of the divine sovereignty and glory was, for Edwards, not goodness or righteousness but beauty."[89] For Edwards, primary beauty was the beauty of God; this was reflected or mirrored in the secondary beauties of nature.[90] One of God's gifts to humanity was the grace to perceive the beauty of nature as the beauty of God. For Edwards, natural beauty both typifies and points toward spiritual beauty: "the harmony of sounds and the beauties of nature have a tendency to assist those whose hearts are under the influence of a truly virtuous temper to dispose them to the exercises of divine love, and enliven in them a sense of spiritual beauty."[91] Once the soul is oriented in Christ to the beauty of God, then everything virtuous is appealing because of its beauty: "When a holy and amiable action is suggested to the thoughts of a holy soul, that soul, if in the lively exercise of its spiritual taste, at once sees a beauty in it, and so inclines to it, and closes with it."[92] Further, this vision extended to material arts. In the thesis of Terrence Erdt, "art as an instance of what he [Edwards] termed secondary beauty can perform a vital religious function by enabling the saint to conceive, and subsequently receive or revive, the particular emotional sensation that constitutes the religious experience—which Edwards referred to as the *sense of the heart.*"[93] Edwards thus used aesthetic language "to conceptualize spiritual sensations," and to approximate religious experience and knowledge.[94] Edwards will never be renowned as a champion of the arts (though he did love music). But he is one of best examples of a theologian whose vision was articulated in part through aesthetic terminology.[95]

(2) *Paul Tillich*

Among twentieth-century theologians, Paul Tillich has been one of the most ardent connoisseurs and devotees of the fine arts, and particularly the visual arts. Tillich saw art as fundamentally sacramental, revealing Ultimate Reality through proximate means. In his words,

> "It is indeed possible to see in a still life of Cézanne, an animal painting of Marc, a landscape of Schmidt-Rottluff, or an erotic painting of Nolde the immediate revelation of an absolute reality in the relative things; the depth-content of the world, experienced in the artist's religious ecstasy, shines through the things; they have become 'sacred' objects."[96]

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[89] *Beauty and Holiness*, 30. The philosophical context of Edwards' thought is explained by Martin as follows: Edwards "combined a Platonic conception of beauty with the empiricism of John Locke to produce an empirical philosophical theology that may be unsurpassed in American thought" (*Beauty and Holiness*, 4).

[90] The image of the mirror is that of John Calvin. See *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.V.1, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 51-53.

[91] Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1966), 31.

[92] Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 281

[93] Terrence Erdt, *Jonathan Edwards: Art and the Sense of the Heart* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), xi.

[94] Erdt, 92.

[95] Significantly, though references to public worship in Edwards extensive works are few, he did use aesthetic terms to describe the revival in Northampton: "Our public assemblies were then beautiful; the congregation was alive in God's service, everyone earnestly intent on the public worship, every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth . . . Our public praises were then greatly enlivened; God was then served in our psalmody, in some measure, in the beauty of holiness." "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God," in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 63.

[96] Paul Tillich, "Religious Style and Religious Material in the Fine Arts," in *On Art and Architecture*, 54.

The making of art, conversely, was taken as an expression of Ultimate Concern, Tillich's code-word for religious faith. Given these assumptions, it is no surprise that Tillich saw art as the interpretive clue necessary for understanding the religious dynamics of a given culture. As Michael Palmer has concluded, "Tillich's philosophy of art has a single objective, and that is that it should meet and exemplify the synthetic requirement of the theology of culture; that it should reveal, in other words, the truth of the claim that religion is the substance of culture and culture the form of religion."[97] For this reason artworks were central in Tillich's own teaching of the history of Christianity and in his systematic and homiletical reflections on aspects of the Christian faith. For Tillich, artwork was inevitably religious, portraying explicitly or implicitly the cosmology of the artist. Artistic expression was understood as fundamentally reflective of and correlated to a particular cosmological and theological vision. Further, Tillich saw it as a particularly luminous and clear way of expressing a cosmological vision. In Tillich's words, "painting is a mute revealer and yet often speaks more perceptibly to the interpreting mind than concept-bearing words."[98] Thus, to use Palmer's turn of phrase, for Tillich "the claim that 'art is religious' is a tautology, the deduction of a conclusion already implicit within the definition of art."[99]

(3) *Gerardus van der Leeuw*

Dutch phenomenologist Gerardus van der Leeuw was one of this century's leading students of world religions and a leading authority on religious art. For van der Leeuw, the central question of aesthetics and art concerned the relationship between beauty and holiness. He was sanguine about the prospect that a work of art may be instrinsically able to bear the holy: "holiness always comprehends beauty . . . their unity does not have to be discovered but can simply be observed."[100] He described this in theological terms as follows: "As theologians, who can neither separate artificially the revelation in Christ and that apparently different one given us as revelation, nor desire to lose ourselves in the generality of an idea of God, we find the unity of art and religion where alone we know unity: in the doctrine of the Incarnation." As such, beauty not only serves to convey the holy, but also "through beauty we can share in his work of new creation. Perpendicular through nature and culture in its heathen holiness, the work of God's creation is erected, even in the work of art of men [and women], which serves him." van der Leeuw's theological claims ultimately derive from his understanding of image and analogy in the bearing of the holy: "we can express the holy only when we can see it as an image."[101] He contends that we know and can speak of God only because God allows himself to be known in and through an image of himself, which we have in Christ. This is paradigmatic for all knowledge and all expressions of the holy, including that of beauty and of art that bears beauty. Yet it is important to observe that van der Leeuw *does not equate beauty and holiness:* "Beauty is holiness. But holiness is not absolutely, not exclusively, beauty; it is more. 'Holy' is the ultimate word; 'beautiful,' the penultimate." Thus, what is sought is the "expression of the holy through the beautiful"—not vice versa. In powerful metaphoric speech: "Climb up upon this height and you will see how the paths of beauty and of holiness approach each other, growing distant, until finally, in the far distance, they can no longer be told apart."[102]

(4) *Hans Urs von Balthasar*

By far the most ambitious recent use of aesthetic categories in theological discourse is that of the Swiss Catholic Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose seven-volume *The Glory of the Lord: Theological Aesthetics* may also be the most comprehensive attempt ever to theologize in light of the transcendental of beauty. Balthasar sets out "to bring about a rediscovery of the authentic contemplative aesthetic dimension so central to Christian life and theology in the patristic and medieval era . . ."[103] His theology is a massive attempt to reclaim for theology the dimension of glory (hence the title *Herrlichkeit*), which he links closely with beauty.[104] However, Balthasar contends that beauty is not some ideal posited on the basis of human cultural activity or philosophy, but rather arises out of revelation itself. Balthasar does not define theological concepts in terms of beauty, as much as he defines beauty in terms of a theological understanding of both revelation and the person and work of Christ.[105] Thus, his is a theological aesthetics (seeing beauty as it emerges from revelation) and not an aesthetical theology (aestheticizing the mystery of Christ on the cross). For Balthasar, aesthetics itself should seek a theological root, foundation, and orientation. In particular, this arises out of reflection on the person of Christ: the form of Christ is the archetype of beauty, where we see the very form of God, and also how God's glory is humanity "fully alive."[106] The full working out of the implications of this claim occupies Balthasar's attention for the remainder of his seven-volume work.

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[97] Michael F. Palmer, *Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Art* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), 176.

[98] Tillich, "Mass and Personality," in *On Art and Architecture*, 58.

[99] *Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Art*, 90.

[100] *Sacred and Profane Beauty*, 266.

[101] *Sacred and Profane Beauty,* 340, 335, 305 respectively.

[102] *Sacred and Profane Beauty,* 266, 327, and 337 respectively.

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[103] Balthasar, see vol. 1, Introduction.

[104] See Louis Dupré, "Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of Aesthetic Form," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 299-318; M. Miller, "The Sacramental Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Worship* 64 (1990): 48-66; John Coulson, "Bringing Beauty Back to Faith," in *The Critical Spirit and the Will to Believe: Essays in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 218-232; and Michael Waldstein, "Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics," *Communio* 11 (1984): 13-27.

[105] Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, 117.

[106] See Breandan Leahy, "Theological Aesthetics," in *The Beauty of Christ: A Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 30.

(5) *Comment*

The fact the theologians named here have all used aesthetic language so significantly in their work suggests the redolent and fruitful prospects of this project. The diversity among these theologians—can one imagine a more diverse group than one that includes von Balthasar, Edwards, and Tillich ?—suggests that these prospects are not limited to one theological or ecclesial tradition within Christianity. Further, the juxtaposition of these thinkers points to a few important generalizations about theological aesthetics.

First, aesthetic language is one language among many for describing divine reality. None of the theologians here described, nor the traditions they represent, seek to abandon the language of truth, righteousness, or holiness in light of the prospects of aesthetic language. Beauty is one mode of discourse for theological reflection.

Second, these multiple languages inevitably correct, delimit, and enrich each other. By themselves, each type of language is inadequate for full-orbed theological discourse. Taken together, they more fully render the mystery of God as intelligible and meaningful to Christian believers. Burch Brown again speaks of transformation: "A more adequate understanding of the relation of the aesthetic realm and its truth(s) to that of theological concepts is that they exist in mutually transformative, dialogical relationship."[107] In part, the contribution of Balthasar, Edwards, van der Leeuw, and Tillich is to counterbalance the majority of theological work that has ignored aesthetic language. Similar claims could be made about the role of art in balancing theological discourse.[108]

Third, theological aesthetics maintains an important distinction between Beauty and God. The language of beauty may point toward God. Beauty may be analogous to the divine or the holy in significant ways. But our worship is not directed to Beauty, but only toward God. This is the significance of van der Leeuw's distinction between beauty and holiness and Balthasar's insistence on primacy of revelation in defining aesthetic virtue. Of the theologians considered here, only Tillich blurs the distinction between the two.

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[107] *Religious Aesthetics*, 42.

[108] As in Burch Brown: "But the special gift of art is not doctrinal precision, conceptual clarity, or the ability to 'think straight.' Art's gift, when not given over simply to a delight that is almost sheerly aesthetic, is rather to explore fictively, metaphorically, and experientially what formal theology cannot itself present or contain" (*ibid.*, 167).

LITURGICAL IMPLICATIONS

> The language of beauty applied in a theological context is no more prominent than in descriptions of and prescriptions for liturgical experience. Consider the following paragraph from Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*: "Of their nature, the arts are directed toward expressing in some way the infinite beauty of God in works made by human hands . . . all things set apart for us in divine worship should be worthy, becoming, and beautiful, signs and symbols of things supernatural" (par. 122). Similar language is used in *Art and Environment in Catholic Worship:* "34. Because the assembly gathers in the presence of God to celebrate his saving deeds, liturgy's climate is one of awe, mystery, wonder, reverence, thanksgiving, and praise. So it cannot be satisfied with anything less than the *beautiful* in its environment and in all its artifacts, movements, and appeals to the senses." Admittedly difficult to define, these documents assume that the beautiful is related to the sense of the numinous, the holy.
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> Recent writings have echoed this close assimilation of aesthetic language into descriptions of liturgy. Kevin Irwin calls for a liturgical aesthetic that "would emphasize how that which is aesthetically pleasing reflects the glory of God and how aesthetically pleasing arts and artifacts are intrinsic to the experience of liturgy and to the theology of liturgy."[109] And Donald Saliers states, "Bearing in mind the ambiguities of the human imagination *per se* and the possibilities of mistaking the symbol for the reality symbolized, liturgical aesthetics proceeds on the assumption that there is an ultimate connection between beauty and the reality of God."[110]
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> The preceding discussion of theological aesthetics commends this use of aesthetic language, but also cautions that aesthetic language be seen only as penultimate, as incomplete, as is all human language confronting the reality of God.

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[109] *Context and Text*, 250.

B. *Art as Surrogate Religion*

As in the case of Tillich, this last distinction has not always been preserved in theological discourse, nor in liturgical and theological practice. When it is not preserved, when beauty and divinity are equated, then invariably not only aesthetic language is applied to theological discourse, but *vice versa*: the language of theology, and spirituality, is applied to the aesthetic. Art becomes the object and not merely the means of worship. Art becomes a surrogate religion.

Such a move is seen most readily among artists and philosophers who merge the language of art and religion, and who operate without concern for relating their professed aesthetic orientation to religious issues. As Wolterstorff describes it,

> ". . . works of art become surrogate gods, taking the place of God the Creator; aesthetic contemplation takes the place of religious adoration; and the artist becomes one who in agony of creation brings forth objects in absorbed contemplation of which we experience what is of ultimate significance in human life. The artist becomes the maker of the gods, we their worshippers. When the secular religions of political revolution and of technological aggrandizement fail their devotees, when they threaten to devour them, then over and

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[110] Don E. Saliers, "Liturgical Aesthetics," *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 33.

> over the cultural elite among modern secular Western men [and women] turn to the religion of aestheticism."[111]

Such aestheticism is easy to recognize among philosophers and artists. Nearly every anthology of writings by artists, musicians, or philosophers of art contains its fair share of ecstatic testimonials on the spiritual qualities of aesthetic experience. But such aestheticism has also been evidenced in Christian theologians and liturgists throughout the history of the church. This was no more apparent than in the nineteenth century, when the influence of Romanticism was felt not only in the arts, but also in theology.[112] Central figures here include Schlegel and Schelling, two philosopher-theologians who contended that material art embodies spiritual reality and that the artist was a bearer of divine revelation. Schelling's contribution is summarized memorably by John Herman Randall:

> "A work of art is inexhaustible, it contains in its perfection far more than the artist consciously put into it. The artist is literally inspired; just as in history unconscious and impersonal forces work through the conscious deeds of men[/women], so in the artistic genius there is revealed a force greater than himself[/herself] that through him creates the infinite and eternal. It is his[/her] proud Fate to serve freely as the tool of the supreme Artist. What he[/she] produces is indeed infinite, and capable of endless meanings; yet it is also a finite and harmonious whole, a genuine synthesis of Nature and Freedom. Beauty is thus a finite embodiment of the Infinite, a union of free activity and the inexhaustible resources of Nature."[113]

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[111] *Art in Action*, 50. And again, 196: "The Christian must resist the claims of ultimacy which repeatedly erupt from our institution of high art. Art does not provide us with the meaning of human existence. The gospel of Jesus Christ does that."

[112] Thomas Franklin O'Meara, "The Aesthetic Dimension in Theology," in *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 205-218.

[113] John Herman Randall, Jr., *The Career of Philosophy*, vol. 2: *From the Enlightenment to the Age of Darwin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 232-236, quoted in Martin, 52.

The explicitly theological character of this statement is an obvious indication of how aesthetic and theological categories were not only blurred but completely merged in the Romantic mind.

The confusion of Beauty and God has elicited sturdy and trenchant critiques of aesthetic language in theology. Even recently, philosopher and theologian Calvin Seerveld has described the "'curse of beauty' for understanding art and for developing a sound aesthetic theory," observing that "beauty was at least a supple, synthetically christian linchpin to help you have your earthly cake and eat it heavenly too." Then he critiques theologians who have paid special attention to the arts for seeking "divine sanction for earthly art by giving it a heavenly meaning, you could say, working with an analogical metaphysics partial to an erotic ladder of Being, amid shadows of natural theology tinctured with mysticism." He concludes that yet "the call to aesthetic (and artistic) normativity does not, however, have to be made in the tainted name of beauty."[114] What Seerveld is lamenting, in part, is the uncritical adoption of a particular philosophical aesthetic tradition into Christian thinking both about the arts and about God. Beyond that, he is lamenting the persistent temptation to take aesthetic categories and language too seriously, to live as if Beauty were the only transcendental, the only and ultimate path to genuine knowledge of and faith in God.

LITURGICAL IMPLICATIONS

> **In the 1920s, Von Ogden Vogt—one of liberal Protestantism's most influential liturgical leaders—contended that humans "must have beauty or they die. Religion cannot be the abundant life of the complete experience without beauty. . . .The spirit of beauty is**

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[114] *Rainbows for a Fallen World*, 117, 118, 122, 125.

> **a religious absolute."[115] Such aestheticism provoked strong reaction in the writings of Paul Waitman Hoon, who lamented that the "God of Beauty has displaced the God of Christian revelation."[116] Similar warnings persist in the writings of Don Saliers, reminding us that aesthetic language has its necessary limits.**

C. *Creation, Incarnation and the Materiality of the Arts*

Quite independently of these discussions of theology and beauty, theological arguments have also been frequently employed in defending or contending the use of the arts in the Christian community. Certainly the most intense theological debates occurred in conjunction with iconoclastic controversies, in both seventh century Eastern and sixteenth century Protestant iconoclasm.[117] What these debates share is attention to two theological loci, the doctrines of creation and incarnation, out of which competing positions on the visual arts were forged. Whether in controversy or calm, Christians have repeatedly gone back to Genesis 1 and John 1, to the fundamental and paradigmatic acts of creation and incarnation, as a basis for understanding material creation and material artistic making. As Don Saliers has summarized:

> "The symbolic value and the beauty of the various elements of the liturgy derive from the material and form of each,

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[115] Von Ogden Vogt, *The Primacy of Worship* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958). See also his *Art and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921) and *Modern Worship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927). James F. White places Vogt in a decade of Protestant liturgical aestheticism, "Public Worship in Protestantism," in *Altered Landscapes: Essays in Honor of Robert T. Handy*, ed. David W. Lotz, Donald W. Shriver, Jr., and John F. Wilson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[116] Paul Waitman Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship*, 68, see also 63-72, 270-291.

[117] The other important issue in sixteenth-century iconoclasm was the interpretation of the second commandment and its prohibition of idolatry. For a recent historical study that reflects on Protestant iconoclasm, see Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Theological reflection on the significance of image in Protestant thought is recently explored in Jérôme Cottin, *Le Regard et la Parole: Une Théologie Protestante de l'image* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994).

> while the sacredness or holiness derives from the mystery of the events celebrated 'in, with, and through' Jesus Christ. These principles are based on the claim that God has created all things and called them good and has become incarnate in Jesus Christ, gathering an historical human community—always culturally embedded and embodied—for worship and service in the world. Liturgical aesthetics is thus rooted and grounded in the doctrines of creation and incarnation."[118]

A first defense of artistic making arises out of a high view of creation. In Colin Gunton's recent statement of the argument: ". . . the world's capacity for form can be properly understood to derive from its createdness."[119] Creation gives us a pattern for creating. It also gives us the stuff from which to create. As Wolterstorff explains it, "With our bodies, among rocks and trees, among colors and fragrances, we find our fulfillment; and only thus do we find it fully. Earthly existence is one of God's favors to us. When the Christian affirms the goodness of the physical creation, [she/]he is not just praising its magnificence. He[/she] is saying that the physical creation is good for human beings. It serves human fulfillment."[120] That God created a material world in which we find our home suggests how fitting it is that we work with the material and perceptible entities in our environment. Surely they are not themselves to be worshiped. Rather, they provide a means for expressing our praise and prayer, for communicating our deepest thoughts and feelings, and for projecting an image of the world that speaks—as the act of creation itself—of divine grace.

The argument for the theological significance of matter has also been advanced on the basis of the Incarnation. As van der Leeuw argued it, "The

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[118] *Worship as Theology*, 64. In Colin Gunton's summary: "A true aesthetics, an adequate account of the materiality of beauty, may be derived from a theology of creation and incarnation in which the goodness and redemption of the material order is taught without an evasion of its fallenness into ugliness and disorder." "Creation and Re-creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology," *Modern Theology* 2 (1985): 17.

[119] *ibid*, 13.

[120] *Art in Action*, 72.

Incarnation means our redemption, also in the sense that the world and our works in it need not be without meaning, but can be bearers of a divine revelation."[121] For Balthasar, the incarnate Christ is "archetype of beauty" or the "aesthetic model of all beauty."[122] But the most famous example may well be the argument John Damascene employed in defense of icons:

> ". . . Therefore I boldly draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes by partaking of flesh and blood. . . .It is obvious that when you contemplate God becoming [hu]man, then you may depict Him clothed in human form. When the invisible One becomes visible to flesh, you may then draw His likeness. . . . In former times, God, being without form or body, could in no way be represented. But today, since God has appeared in the flesh and lived among men [and women], I can represent what is visible in God."[123]

For John the doctrinal critique of docetism became the grounds for use of the material arts in worship. But the incarnation did not only mean that materiality could be charged with the glory of God; it also gave warrant to the attempt to portray God in the image of Christ. The message of John 1, "the Word became flesh," is thus one of the most profound statements regarding the material world ever made, and has provided a biblical theological argument for generations of iconodules and defenders of artistic making.

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[121] *Sacred and Profane Beauty*, 340.

[122] *Herrlichkeit*, I, p. 459, 585, quoted in Waldstein, "Balthasar's theological aesthetics," 16.

[123] *On the Divine Images* I.4, I.8, I.16, in John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*. trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 5-16, 18, 23. See also Thomas F. X. Noble, "John Damascene and the History of the Iconoclastic Controversy," in *Religion, Culture, and Society*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble, John J. Contreni (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1987). Scholars have traditionally asserted that Constantine V should be credited with casting the iconoclastic controversy in Christological terms. Noble contends that John did. An overview of the Christological foundation to iconography is found in Christoph Schönborn, *God's Human Face* (San Fransico: Ignatius Press, 1994).

LITURGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The liturgical implications of this discussion are readily apparent. Words are insufficient for full-orbed liturgy. Christian worship arises out of a fundamentally material world. It is properly expressed, even embodied, through expressly material forms. The adjective "docetic" arose in discussions about the nature of Christ's simultaneous humanity and divinity. Yet it is often used to describe other dimensions of Christian belief and practice that fail to do justice to the material dimension of creation. "Docetic" liturgy then would be liturgy that arises out of full appreciation for the divinity of Christ and the Spirituality of faith, but fails to acknowledge the materiality of either Christ's presence or of the embodied character of worship. Despite the dangers of applying a term from one area of doctrinal discussion to another aspect of the faith, considering the charge that a great deal of worship is docetic focuses careful attention on important implications of how material entities are employed in the Christian community.

D. *The Correspondence of Theological and Aesthetic Form*

A fourth point of intersection between theology and aesthetics lies in the important ways in which aesthetic forms are shaped by theological worldview. Schütz and Monteverdi wrote different music not only because of the few decades that separated their work or their own unique personalities, but also because of the contrasting theological vision and liturgical practice that their ecclesiastical traditions defended. As this and numerous other examples attest, there is an inevitable fundamental correspondence between one's worldview and one's artistic making and acting.[124] Thus, it is no surprise that the monks at Saint-Denis, with their luminous Dionysian worldview, should be the community to produce Gothic.[125] This correspondence is why Rembrandt's painting may be described as Calvinist, or why Tillich called Picasso's *Guernica* an example of the Protestant view of the world.[126] It is why Jaroslav Pelikan can trace changing views of Jesus in history in part by chronicling the history of how Jesus was depicted in visual art.[127] And it is why aesthetician Monroe Beardsley contrasts the *descendit* passages (from the *Credo*) in Palestrina's *Pope Marcellus Mass* and in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in theological terms: "There are two descents, so to speak, but what different descents they are! In Palestrina the coming of Christ is a serene passage into the world from a realm not utterly remote; in Beethoven it is a dramatic plunge."[128] Aesthetic making, as we have already seen, arises out of or in response to a community and its worldview. And when they arise, artistic forms project a world. Both the community's worldview and the world an artwork projects include a theological dimension that involves a conception of God, the cosmos, and their relations.

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[124] Pointing out these correspondences is the standard fare of good art appreciation courses. But often the theological dimensions of worldviews are not adequately accounted for. For a helpful effort at describing broad patterns of correspondence between theological understanding and artworks, see Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 117-130; see also Chidester, "Aesthetic Strategies in Western Religious Thought," 55, 56.

LITURGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Liturgical arts are not neutral bearers of meaning. They inevitably interpret the gospel. And they speak louder than words. Often sermons or homilies are shouted down by the building which houses worship or the music which accompanies it. A homily on spiritual maturity is not well served by a sentimental setting of the psalm of the day. Neither is a sermon on simplicity well complemented by a Mozart aria. Thomas Troeger argues for "*an integrity of form and faith*, a theological-aesthetic coherence that makes them effective bearers of the divine. . . . The appropriate use of art in liturgy requires that we first name those fundamental theological principles which shape our identity as reformed congregations, and then explore how the Spirit of God is expanding those principles to embrace more of that truth which is beyond the grasp of any human formulation."[129] Liturgical artists must be sensitive to how their contribution interprets the gospel and relates to the theological vision of their community and the worldwide church.

E. *Sin, Shalom, and Aesthetic Making and Meaning*

A final, though infrequent, topic for theological aesthetics is that of describing the role of artistic and aesthetic forms in the full-orbed Christian life. As is readily apparent to any thoughtful observer, aesthetic making and meaning can richly contribute or can regretfully harm artists and their communities. Art can bear prophetic truth, or perpetuate the misuse of power. It can inspire right worship, or idolatrously become the object of worship itself. Aesthetic life has both its sinners and its saints.

Burch Brown is especially clear on the "sinful" aspects of aesthetic experience, which are summarized in his memorable chapter, "Sin and Bad Taste." Based on his thesis that aesthetic, religious, and moral meanings are inevitably intertwined, co-existing in a mutual transforming relationship, Burch Brown contends that taste is an "intrinsic part of morality and religion," such that "failure to distinguish genuine beauty from counterfeit can lead to moral error. Moral and aesthetic discernment often go hand in hand."[130] He identifies four categories of what he calls "sinful taste," as exemplified in four types of aesthetic sinners:

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[125] Anne Walters Robertson even contends that the composed plainchant arising out of the community at Saint-Denis reflected this Dionysian worldview. See *The Service-Books of the Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis: Images of Ritual and Music in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

[126] John Dillenberger, "Introduction," in *Art and Architecture*, xvii.

[127] *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

[128] Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958), quoted in Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 117.

[129] Thomas H. Troeger, "Art in Worship: The Integrity of Form and Faith," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 18 (1984): 122-125.

[130] *Religious Aesthetics*, 148, 136.

> "First, the Aesthete—'the person whose chief goal is not glorifying and enjoying God but glorying in the aesthetic delights of creation.'
>
> "Second, the Philistine—one who 'does not highly value or personally appreciate anything artistic and aesthetic that cannot be translated into practical, moral, or specifically religious terms.' As Burch Brown notes, this sin is exposed in Walker's *The Color Purple*, where Shug says to Celie: 'I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it.'
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> "Third, the Intolerant—one who 'is keenly aware of aesthetic standards of appraisal, but elevates his or her own standards to the level of absolutes . . . [it is] the aesthetic equivalent of the sin of pride . . . it severs human ties and does violence to the freedom, integrity, and self-hood of others.' This is a temptation that particularly confronts the intellectual and cultural elite.
>
> "Fourth, the Indiscriminate—those whose 'radical aesthetic relativism . . . indiscriminately [embraces] all aesthetic phenomena' and those who 'cannot distinguish between what in their own experience has relatively lasting value and what is just superficially appealing'."[131]

Each of these in their own way perverts the purposes of artistic making and meaning.

Yet if there are aesthetic sinners, there may also be aesthetic saints. Perhaps the clearest statement of the right use of aesthetic forms is offered by Wolterstorff, who contends that art is "a component within and a species of that joy which belongs to the shalom God has ordained as the goal of existence." And shalom, as Wolterstorff explains it, is that rich Hebraic idea, so influential in the eschatological portions of Isaiah, that describes the human experience of wholesomeness, integrity, and delight in all relationships—with God, with each other, and with nature—for "shalom is a peace which is not merely the absence of hostility, though certainly it is that, but a peace which at its highest is *enjoyment*. To dwell in shalom is to *enjoy* living before God, to *enjoy* living in nature, to *enjoy* living with one's fellows, to *enjoy* life with oneself."[132] This vision of the coming kingdom is realized in our experience in part through the sheer wholesome enjoyment of the good gift of life in our experience of the arts.

LITURGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Burch Brown's four aesthetic sins find easy corollaries in worshiping communities. Churches have their Aesthetes and Philistines, their Intolerants and Indiscriminants. Liturgists themselves are hardly immune to these diseases. As pastoral ministers, liturgists must stand against philistine indiscriminancy, mindful of Calvin Seerveld's warning that "kitsch oversimplifies emotional nuances and reduces aesthetically sensitive life to a one-track, predictable, pseudo-transcendent satisfaction."[133] Liturgists must also fight intolerant aestheticism that undermines pastoral ministry and tears apart the body of Christ.

Perhaps more appealing are thoughts about liturgy's manifestation of *shalom*. For many harried, weary Christians, liturgy at its best is a taste of the coming kingdom. It is a respite of beauty in an aesthetically impoverished world. This is a gift of God's grace that must be nurtured and cherished.

As mentioned before, theological aesthetics is by no means a carefully defined discipline. And the issues highlighted here hardly scratch the surface of all the various angles from which one might profitably examine the intersection of theological and aesthetic concerns. At the very least, this brief overview suggests the complexity of this intersection and warns against making hasty or reckless claims about the aesthetic nature of liturgy, itself so charged with theological significance.

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[131] *Religious Aesthetics*, 152-154.

[132] *Art in Action*, 169, 79.

[133] *Rainbows for a Fallen World*, 66.

III. LITURGICAL AESTHETICS

Liturgical scholars and liturgical celebrants have long been attuned to the aesthetic dimensions of liturgical experience. Recall the rhapsodic descriptions of liturgical experience by Augustine or Abbot Suger. The twentieth century in particular has witnessed comprehensive scholarly reflection on the aesthetic dimension of liturgy. The first wave of that reflection was part of the Liturgical Movement that led up to and immediately followed Vatican II and is exemplified by books such as H. A. Reinhold's *Art and Liturgy*.[134] A second wave of contributions has occurred the past decade with contributions by Don Saliers, John Collins, John Foley, and Janet Walton.[135]

Treatments of the aesthetic dimensions of the liturgy are still too few to warrant the naming of a sub-discipline as "Liturgical Aesthetics," as if it were as well-developed as the sub-disciplines of philosophical and theological aesthetics. But what would liturgical aesthetics look like? For future consideration, I propose the following two criteria:

> 1) Liturgical aesthetics has a proper *subject*: the aesthetic dimension of liturgy and the art-forms that are allied with liturgical celebration. Typical questions that have already commanded attention include: Is liturgy itself an art-form? How can the aesthetic aspect of liturgical experience be described and related to other aspects of liturgical experience? What is the proper function of liturgical arts?
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> 2) Liturgical aesthetics operates with a particular *method* and *criteria*. Liturgical aesthetics need not be limited to merely philosophical or theological aesthetics applied to liturgy, involving only the type of comments marked off as "liturgical implications" in Section I and II of this report. Rather, legitimate criteria for liturgical aesthetics arise out of reflection on the nature of liturgy itself. Method in liturgical aesthetics consists of reflections about liturgy, on liturgical experience. Criteria in liturgical aesthetics are the very same as those for the liturgy itself.

The following analysis attends to three questions identified here as the proper subject of liturgical aesthetics and attempts to envision answers, albeit preliminary ones, to these questions along the lines of what is proposed as the proper method and criteria of liturgical aesthetics.

A. *Liturgy as Art*

Nearly every popular and scholarly treatment of the artistic components of liturgical celebration slip into an apologetic tone of voice. The reasons for this are simple. Liturgical artists often feel defensive, as the arts often surface as the last priority in parish celebrations and, especially, in budgetary planning. Likewise, liturgical scholars are often passionate connoisseurs of liturgical arts, and are eager to promote their place in the liturgy of the church. This digression into the sociology of knowledge helps account for what is nearly a universal claim among these sources, namely, that liturgical arts are so intrinsic to liturgy because liturgy itself is art. Listen to a small sampling of these voices:

- Gerardus van der Leeuw: ". . . whether it is rich or impoverished, developed or truncated, the liturgy of the Church is in any case drama, and it is in any case art."[136]

- Lawrence Hoffman: "I want to urge people not only to attend to the specific arts that go into their worship, but to transcend that first step by seeing their worship as more comprehensive art in and of itself."[137]

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[134] H. A. Reinhold, *Art and Liturgy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966).

[135] See also Hermann Reifenberg, "Liturgieästhetik: Feier des 'Heiligen' Im Magnetfeld des 'Schönen': Perspektiven, Ausprägungen, Differenzierungen und Gesamtverständnis christlicher Kultästhetick," *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 26 (1984): 117-146.

[136] *Sacred and Profane Beauty*, 110.

[137] Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer: Not For Clergy Only* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1988), 36.

- Don E. Saliers: "Liturgical action does not simply use art, it *IS* art—dialogue with God in symbolic form"; liturgy itself "requires all that art requires: form, material, discipline, imagination, and pain."[138]

What these authors certainly establish is that liturgy exhibits many of the same qualities or components as do works of art. Recalling our discussion of philosophical aesthetics above, we might say that the meaning of liturgy is communicated, in part, through its significant form. Liturgy is enacted with materiality and liturgy is contemporaneous. Liturgy is experienced through perception; it evokes immediate response; it inevitably involves interpretation and evaluation. Liturgy is multivalent, allusive, metaphoric, and symbolic. In all these ways, liturgy resembles art.

But at this point, one important caution warns against elevating this resemblance to a complete identification, transforming this analogy to a virtual equation of liturgy and art. As John Foley warns, "Liturgy is not itself an art genre . . . liturgy is not the child of a single artisan . . . it does not reveal a single person's subjectivity but that of a people."[139] Foley points to an important dissimilarity between liturgy and most artworks that we encounter, one that concerns artistic making or creating. Art, as we have seen, is valued in Western culture for its being the product of a creative genius who agonizes to produce an innovative, daring, and emotion-laden work. Liturgy, as Foley points out, does not strive for such singularity, such innovation, such identification with individual human subjectivity. And calling liturgy an art, while not a catastrophic hyperbole, can promote the wrong impression, especially in a culture whose aesthetic vocabulary has been shaped so significantly by purist aesthetics theories. Liturgy is not art; rather it is analogous to art. There are similarities and dissimilarities between liturgy and art that can best be preserved if the relationship between the two is one of analogy.

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[138] "Liturgical Aesthetics," 33; *Worship As Theology*, 206.

[139] *Creativity and the Roots of Liturgy*, 244.

B. *The Aesthetic Dimension of Liturgy*

Whether or not liturgy itself is called an art, what cannot be denied is the significant and meaning-laden aesthetic dimension of liturgical experience. One of the primary contributions of writers like Gordon Lathrop, Nathan Mitchell, Gail Ramshaw, Don Saliers, and Janet Walton, to name just a few, has been their evocative and rhapsodic writing on the aesthetic dimension of corporate worship. One could hardly underestimate the pull of the aesthetic dimension of liturgy in leading people into various pastoral ministries, as well as to the study of liturgy.

But suppose that we prescind from the devotional and inspirational aspects of the aesthetic dimension of the liturgy in order to propose a theoretical framework for considering the place and function of that aesthetic dimension. Certainly for this effort the insights of Burch Brown are well-poised to help us. Recall how Burch Brown argued that each artifact that possesses aesthetic qualities also shares a complex set of other values, and that these various components interact, transforming each other in the process. These transformations are directly applicable to the aesthetic dimension of liturgy. Consider the following two examples Burch Brown offers from liturgical celebration:

> "There are still other secondarily artistic spheres in which the aesthetic elements, however subsidiary in awareness, are essential to one's ability to make or perceive vividly and meaningfully what is of paramount interest. The Easter liturgy of the Russian Orthodox Church, for instance, would be immeasurably impoverished without its knowledgeably produced and richly aesthetic qualities, all of which remain subsidiary in one's attention. The makers of liturgy thus are significantly, though still not primarily, artists and should be recognized as akin to religious dramatists or painters; the participant in liturgy likewise is a kind of performer, albeit sometimes unpracticed or inept.

> "If, then, it is a whole perceptual milieu that is aesthetic and not just an isolated object, and if that milieu can contain religious elements, how are we to tell when to call something aesthetic and when to call it religious? . . . In the context of a Vespers service a Mozart setting of the Psalm 'Laudate Dominum' normally is heard as (aesthetically) religious, whereas is a concert hall it normally is heard as (religiously) aesthetic. In one context the listener is focally aware of elements that in the other contexts become subsidiary."[140]

In each case, the aesthetic dimension of the liturgy is significant but not isolated nor ultimate. Rather, the aesthetic dimension intersects and is transformed by other dimensions. Consider also the following examples:

> 1) Bishop Desmond Tutu celebrates the Eucharist at an ecumenical gathering in New York. He wears full South African vesture. He dances the Eucharist prayer, ending with an ecstatic soliloquy of praise prior to the communion. Here is a case where political meaning (Bishop Tutu's identification with oppressed South African blacks), aesthetic meaning (the artistry of the dance), and theological meanings (the text of the prayer) mutually enrich and transform each other. Any of these without the other would be impoverished.
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> 2) On a Sunday in Advent, the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* are sung by a choir of developmentally and physically disabled children. The Old Testament lectionary reading is from Isaiah 35. Their singing, by any standard measure, lacks aesthetic integrity—it is unrhythmic and out of tune. Yet here a powerful symbiosis of social factors (personal knowledge of individual choristers) and theological factors (the vivid and hope-filled eschatological theme of Isaiah 35) transform the aesthetic dimension of the choir's contribution into a rich, kingdom-oriented liturgical experience.

In each case, meaning is communicated in part through a complex "liturgical milieu," in which an aesthetic dimension plays a significant, but not ultimate role. Just as van der Leeuw spoke of holiness as the ultimate referent, and beauty as the penultimate, so too liturgical aestheticians must acknowledge that aesthetics is an immensely redolent and important dimension of liturgical experience, but is not ultimate. As Saliers points out: "Aesthetic experience as such is not the primary aim of the public worship of God. The praise, the glorification of God, and the transformation toward the Holy is."[141] With such a sensibility, a liturgical aesthetic is poised to chart a middle course between aestheticism and iconoclasm.

So in summary, it could be argued that 1) *the aesthetic dimension of liturgy interacts in a transformative process with other dimensions of liturgy*, and 2) *the aesthetic dimension of liturgy is important, but not ultimate.* But what of supposedly aesthetically barren celebrations? What of gatherings that shun art, sully musical contributions, and squelch symbolic actions? Here Burch Brown is also helpful, pointing out that simplicity and barrenness in celebration does not end the aesthetic dimension of public worship; even "the relatively unceremonious style of worship and pulpit rhetoric often associated with Free Church Protestantism has an aesthetic rhythm and impact of its own."[142] Public worship is necessarily material, perceptible. Speaking, reading, singing—these actions generate sound waves that ears perceive. Movement, posture, space—these aspects create impressions that eyes perceive. Thus, we conclude that 3) *the aesthetic dimension of worship is inevitable.*

But is this inevitable aesthetic dimension always concerned with "Beauty?" Or, more provocatively, should it be? Here Janet Walton speaks with insight: ". . . the definition of beauty comprises more than what is pleasing. It also includes what is truthful and what is original. These latter interpretations are critical to a discussion of beauty within worship because the liturgy expresses pain, frustration and struggle as well as the promise of fullness of life. Beauty is found in both the unpleasant and the pleasant."[143] In a broken and hurting world, the so-called aesthetic beauty of pristine nineteenth century paintings may not be a beauty fitting to public worship. In the world projected by traditional Christian worship, ultimate beauty is eschatological. Christian worship at times realizes a bit of that beauty; at other times, it only expresses longing for it.[144] Thus, 4) *Christian worship resists the purist conception of beauty that values the pristine and the sublime; it accepts the term beauty only when "beauty" is redefined—especially in light of the cross.*[145]

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[140] *Religious Aesthetics*, 87, 76.

[141] *Worship As Theology*, 205.

[142] *Religious Aesthetics*, 40.

C. *The Liturgical Arts*

This aesthetic dimension of the liturgy is typically expressed and constituted in Christian worship through one or another of the liturgical arts. Liturgical arts include every artistic media and genre that are employed in the celebration of Christian worship. Liturgical art is a category that is related to, but certainly is not identical to "sacred art" or "religious art."[146] It does not include art on religious subjects that hang in public museums. Nor does it include musical works originally intended for liturgical celebration that are now exclusively rendered in popular concerts. Liturgical art, thus, is properly all of the arts used in liturgy as they are employed in liturgy.

This simple definition of liturgical art suggests an approach for defining criteria for liturgical art. It suggests that *liturgical art at its best embodies the purposes of liturgy itself, and is meant to carry out, to perform, to enact, to make*

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[143] Janet Walton, *Art in Worship : A Vital Connection* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), 60. On this point, see also Hoon: "liturgy on occasion will prefer the ugly to the beautiful as a less untruthful way of rendering the encounter between God and [hu]man[ity] . ." (*The Integrity of Worship*, 70).

[144] See Saliers, *Worship As Theology*, 215.

[145] It is on this point that Balthasar's theological project is especially pertinent.

[146] This distinction is especially important in approaching the vast literature on religious art. Most histories of religious art are only in part concerned with liturgical art. Often the most salient and laudable features of such artworks are those that render them useless for liturgical celebration.

real the shared actions of the gathered ecclesial community. Good liturgical art, in brief, excels in the criteria of its own genre *and* is fitting to the actions of the liturgy.

This straightforward approach is not terribly new or innovative. Listen to the following voices who articulate a similar vision:

- Cyprian Vaggaggini: ". . . the end of art is at the service of a higher end, the liturgy's own end: the Church's sanctification and worship in Christ."[147]

- Gerardus van der Leeuw: ". . . it is obvious that music used in worship must have its own style, its own character, which is determined by the form of worship and its historical development."[148]

- Nicholas Wolterstorff: "Liturgy without art is something the church has almost always avoided. . . . But unless distortion creeps in, art in the liturgy is at the service of the liturgy. . . . Good liturgical art is art that serves effectively the actions of the liturgy. . . . that the actions. . . . be performed with clarity. . . .without tending to distract persons from the performance of the action. . . . without undue awkwardness and difficulty."[149]

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[147] Cyprian Vaggagini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy*, trans. Leonard J. Doyle and W. A. Jurgens (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1976), 51.

[148] *Sacred and Profane Beauty*, 270.

[149] *Art in Action*, 184-185. See also p. 116, where he observes "The Christian liturgy is a sequence of actions: confession, proclamation of forgiveness, praise, and so forth. And works of art—passages of music, for example—can be more or less fitting to these distinct actions. What fits the act of confession well may be quite unfitting to the action of praise." And also: "It is habitual for musicians trained within our institution of high art to approach the music of the liturgy by insisting that it be good music, and to justify that insistence by saying that God wants us to present our very best to Him—all the while judging good music not by reference to the purposes of the liturgy but by reference to the purpose of aesthetic contemplation" (184). At the end of the day, this is a damning sentence to many liturgical musicians—especially in light of the comments on aesthetic contemplation offered above.

> - John Foley: "We have to understand liturgy itself in order to see how music and the other arts operate within the liturgy, for the purposes of it, rather than outside it for other purposes. . ."
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> "Music, dance, homiletics, gesture, and decoration partake of this overarching form, each contributing it own substance to liturgy's semblance. . . Composers, musicians, choreographers, etc., must be masters first of liturgy and only then artists of their art form."[150]
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> - *Art and Environment in Catholic Worship*:
> "21. *Appropriateness* is another demand that liturgy rightfully makes upon any art that would serve its action. The work of art must be appropriate in two ways: 1) it must be capable of bearing the weight of mystery, awe, reverence, and wonder which the liturgical action expresses; 2) it must clearly *serve* (and not interrupt) ritual action, which has its own structure, rhythm and movement." And a bit later:
> "25. If an art form is used in liturgy it must aid and serve the action of liturgy since liturgy has its own structure, rhythm and pace: a gathering, a building up, a climax, and a descent to dismissal. It alternates between persons and groups of persons, between sound and silence, speech and song, movement and stillness, proclamation and reflection, word and action. The art form must never seem to interrupt, replace, or bring the course of liturgy to a halt."

To this proposal, there is one common objection: that requiring fittingness to liturgical actions diminishes any potential for liturgical art to be good art in and of itself. This concern is expressed, among others, by John Dillenberger:

> "But among those responsible for services of worship, a preoccupation with the dynamics of the worship service has led to a conviction that only that which directly serves the liturgy has an appropriate place . . . That outlook encourages the use of poor art, including the inordinate profusion of banners, with the result that only art which has no power of its own, that is, only art that can be used for purposes other than what art conveys, is acceptable. Such a reintroduction of art is neither dangerous nor helpful; such art is simply banal."[151]

This criticism identifies a common problem in liturgical celebration, the profusion of poorly-rendered artworks. Yet requiring that liturgical art serve the purposes of the liturgy does not create an inherent barrier to the creation of good art. Just as a good sermon should be both an example of good rhetoric and meet certain liturgical criteria, so too an architectural design of a liturgical space or any other example from the liturgical arts should strive to be both good art and good art for liturgy. Further, this liturgical criterion need not apply to all religious art, but only to art that contributes to liturgical celebration, which certainly extends far beyond liturgical banners.

But if liturgical art is properly charged with fulfilling the function of the liturgy, what is that function? The following six theses attempt to answer this question. They are all based on common assumptions about the nature and purpose of Christian worship, and are derived from frequently offered statements that suggest a broad consensus among liturgists. This is not an exhaustive, but only a suggestive list. But in each case they suggest fruitful ways of linking some of the most salient characteristics of the liturgical arts with the very purposes of the liturgy itself.

1) *Liturgical art proclaims God's word, and envisions God's kingdom. Liturgical art is prophetic.* Liturgy is proclamation, announcement.[152] In liturgy God's Word is proclaimed through word and table; in liturgy "we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Likewise, art proclaims. It announces God's grace and goodness. It critiques our world. In Saliers's words, "It is an epiphany of the divine self-communication in and through the created order's sensible signs."[153]

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[150] Foley, *Creativity and Roots of Liturgy*, 4, 268.

[151] John Dillenberger, "The Visual and the Verbal: One Reality, Two Modalities," *Review and Expositor* 87 (1990): 563-568.

[152] See the discussion of this theme in Bernard J. Cooke, *The Distancing of God: The Ambiguity of Symbol in History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 330-332. See also Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 83, 108-111; and Walton, *Art in Worship*, 77.

[153] *Worship As Theology*, 212.

2) *Liturgical art is an offering to God. It is prayer to God. It offers prayer itself and invites others to join in that offering. Liturgical art is priestly.* Liturgical art may itself be a prayer, as in musical settings of the *Kyrie*. It also invites people to pray, pointing not to itself, but rather to God.

3) *Liturgical art remembers and narrates the story of God's actions with humanity. Liturgical art is anamnetic.*[154] As Janet Walton points out, "the essence of important events is often kept alive through art . . . art offers unparalleled possibilities for recalling the meaning of significant events."[155] In visually oriented periods of history—like the Middle Ages or like the post-modern West—visual depictions, images, and icons remind people of the central narrative elements of the biblical story which serves as a source of identity for baptized Christians.

4) *Liturgical art evokes eschatological hope.* Art, as Romano Guardini pointed out, "rouses the hope . . . that the world as it ought to be will at some time actually arise."[156] Worship does the same. As Saliers contends: "The promise of the art of liturgy over time is that, in singing a new song to the Lord, God will reveal some new aspect of our lives in light of God's future for the world."[157]

5) *Liturgical art projects a world; it fashions a world-view.* As Lawrence Hoffman has argued: "Above all, men and women charged with liturgy need to be artists, aware of their responsibility not just to intone words and move in certain ways, but *to fashion through it all a vision of the universe* where order is sufficiently compelling to banish all doubt. For in the end our ritualizing articulates structure . . . Ritual is first, not last in the chain of belief

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[154] See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Art of Remembering," Christians in the Visual Arts Newsletter, 1995. For more information on this organization, write CIVA, PO Box 18117, Minneapolis, MN 55418.

[155] *Art in Worship*, 82, see also her discussion of the art at Dura-Europas as anamnetic.

[156] Karl Rahner, "Priest and Poet" in *Theological Investigations*, vol. III, trans. Karl H. and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1967), 295-317, quoted in Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 85.

[157] *Worship As Theology*, 208.

formation."[158] Just as art projects a world, so too does public worship. At its best, it forms worshipers more fully in the meaning of the biblical story of God's graceful ways with broken people.

6) *Liturgical art is communal.* And in all of these functions, art is the property of the community. In Wolterstorff's words, "Liturgical art is not the artist 'doing his own thing,' the artist 'doing her own thing,' with the rest of us standing by as appreciators and critics. Liturgical art is the offering of the artist to the liturgical community for *its* praise and confession and intercession. Liturgical art is art on *our* behalf, art enabling *us* to complete the cosmic circle. In liturgical art, the liturgical community finds *its* artful priestly hands and voice."[159] For this no pride of place is offered to the autonomous, solitary, artistic genius. Instead, the liturgical arts take the role of servant, giving worshipers a voice they never knew they had to offer praise and prayer to God.[160]

Postscript: Future Directions

This essay has only begun to scratch the surface of possible links between philosophical, theological, and liturgical aesthetics. A number topics remain to be considered. The following are among the most promising.

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[158] *The Art of Public Prayer*, 148.

[159] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "What is This Thing—Liturgical Art," in *Art in Worship—Clay and Fiber* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College Center Art Gallery, 1988), 7.

[160] Gordon Lathrop makes a similar point as follows: "In current European-American culture, certain kinds of art will be misplaced in the meeting: art that is primarily focused on the self-expression of the alienated artist or performer; art that is a self-contained performance; art that cannot open itself to sing around a people hearing the word and holding a meal; art that is merely religious in the sense of dealing with a religious theme or enabling individual and personal meditation but not communal engagement; art that is realistic rather than iconic; art, in other words, that directly and uncritically expresses the values of our current culture" (*Holy Things*, 223).

1) *Art and Anthropology*

Liturgists have already profited a great deal from the methods and insights of cultural anthropologists (see *Liturgy Digest* 1:1 and 2:2). Yet one aspect of anthropology not yet explored by liturgists is the anthropological study of aesthetics.[161] Anthropological aesthetics has the value of reminding us of the stunning variety in the uses of art in ritual contexts. Pioneers in this field include Otto, Eliade, van der Leeuw, and Geertz, whose names are already well known in liturgical circles.

2) *Liturgical History*

Liturgical history is always asking questions about the interrelatedness of liturgical texts, actions, and gestures. To this mix may be added consideration of the functional aesthetic in the various periods of liturgical history. What did earlier Christians believe was beautiful? Did this change their approach to worship? Was beauty valued as a liturgical ideal?

Further, liturgical historians must continue to dialogue with those who study the history of Christian art forms. Liturgists must read Thomas Mathews' *Early Christian Art*, Margaret Miles' *Image as Insight*, Charles Garside's *Zwingli and the Arts*, Jaroslav Pelikan's *Bach Among the Theologians*, and John Dillenberger's *Christian Art in America*. These and similar works help us enter into the spirit and ethos of worship in historical and cultural contexts very different from our own. Liturgists may also be able to contribute to the historical study of religious art, with particular sensitivity to the importance of the liturgical context for the significance of a given work.[162]

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[161] See *Liturgy Digest* 1:1 and 2:2 for an introduction to the use of anthropological methods in liturgical studies. On the anthropological study of aesthetics, see *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), and Robert Layton, *The Anthropology of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[162] See, for example, Anne Walters Robertson, *The Service-Books of the Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis: Images of Ritual and Music in the Middle Ages*; and Craig Wright, *Music and Ceremony at Notre Dame of Paris, 500-1550* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

3) *Liturgical "Criticism" and Reform*

Liturgists are always making judgments about the relative adequacy of liturgical celebration. This process could be informed by reflecting seriously on the process of aesthetic criticism. How are judging art and judging liturgy alike? How are they different? In judging art, for example, originality is often taken to be a key criterion. Is this appropriate for liturgical art? Is beauty to be equated with excellence, that is, is good liturgy always beautiful?

4) *Popular Art*

The central challenge of worship leadership in North America today arises out of the pervasive influence of popular culture (more on this will appear in the next issue of *Liturgy Digest*). Surely in the postmodern West, there is a multiplicity of art worlds. Wolterstorff, for example, distinguishes "works of high art," "works of popular art," and "works of the tribe" in terms of who participates in making and appropriating them.[163] Philosophical aesthetics has begun to take more seriously the particular issues surrounding popular art.[164] Liturgists have offered a steady stream of jeremiads concerning aspects of popular culture. Further work could intersect with initial scholarly attempts at learning how popular culture "works," how it communicates symbolic meanings and mediates political power.

5) *Liturgical Theology*

Donald Saliers contends that "the 'aesthetics' of liturgical celebration becomes profoundly relevant to liturgy as primary theology."[165] Burch Brown argues that the inevitable aesthetic dimension in liturgy and profound multivalent transformations in which it participates requires theological attention and understanding.[166] And very recently, Paul Marshall has called liturgical theologians to "pay attention to how the arts, especially music, convey or emphasize the deep structure [of liturgical celebration] in ways that are not obvious in meditation on liturgical structures."[167] Particular work is needed in stating precisely the relationship of theological and liturgical aesthetics. Any of the six topics discussed in Section II of this review warrant development with respect to their liturgical implications.

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[163] *Art in Action*, 22-23.

[164] See, for example, Shusterman, *Pragmatic Aesthetics*, chapters 7 and 8, and the publication *The Journal of Popular Culture*.

[165] *Worship as Theology*, 141.

[166] In addition to his *Religious Aesthetics*, often cited in this review, see "Aesthetics," in *The New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 17-22.

6) *Theological Education and Spiritual Formation*

Students of theology and Christian ministry are typically preparing for vocations that will require of them a lifetime of manipulating aesthetica. They will preach sermons, lead liturgical music, and sit on committees that design spaces for worship. At least one purpose of theological education is to prepare people to handle these tasks with competence and insight. Further, theological education is also about formation in the Christian faith. Seminaries, ministry centers, and even theology departments—whether they acknowledge it or not—are shaping the religious experience of teachers and students alike. Such formation, if full-orbed, cannot rely on discursive language alone. Without the nuance, allusiveness, visuality, and materiality of the arts, theological education and formation is reduced to words and discursive meanings. For these two reasons, a variety of voices have called for rethinking the aesthetic dimension of theological education.[168] Future work can extend this conversation, particularly by linking it to the practice and study of liturgy.

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[167] Paul V. Marshall, "Reconsidering 'Liturgical Theology': Is There a *Lex Orandi* for All Christians?" *Studia Liturgica* 25 (1995): 129-150.

[168] Wilson Yates, *The Arts in Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987). See also Maria Harris, "Art and Religious Education: A Conversation," *Religious Education* 83 (1988): 453-473.

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"Perhaps there are a few generous, humane Christians and a few reflective, reverent servants of art, Christians who have learned, through the manifestation of their Lord, to love the whole manifest world. Perhaps there are servants of beauty who are conscious that their love is directed toward him who is beauty itself, indeed more than beauty. Perhaps there are men [and women] on both sides who have not bent their knees before Baal, the Baal of a self-made Christianity or a self-made art, but who can kneel before God, always and everywhere."

— Gerardus van der Leeuw (*Sacred and Profane Beauty*, xii)